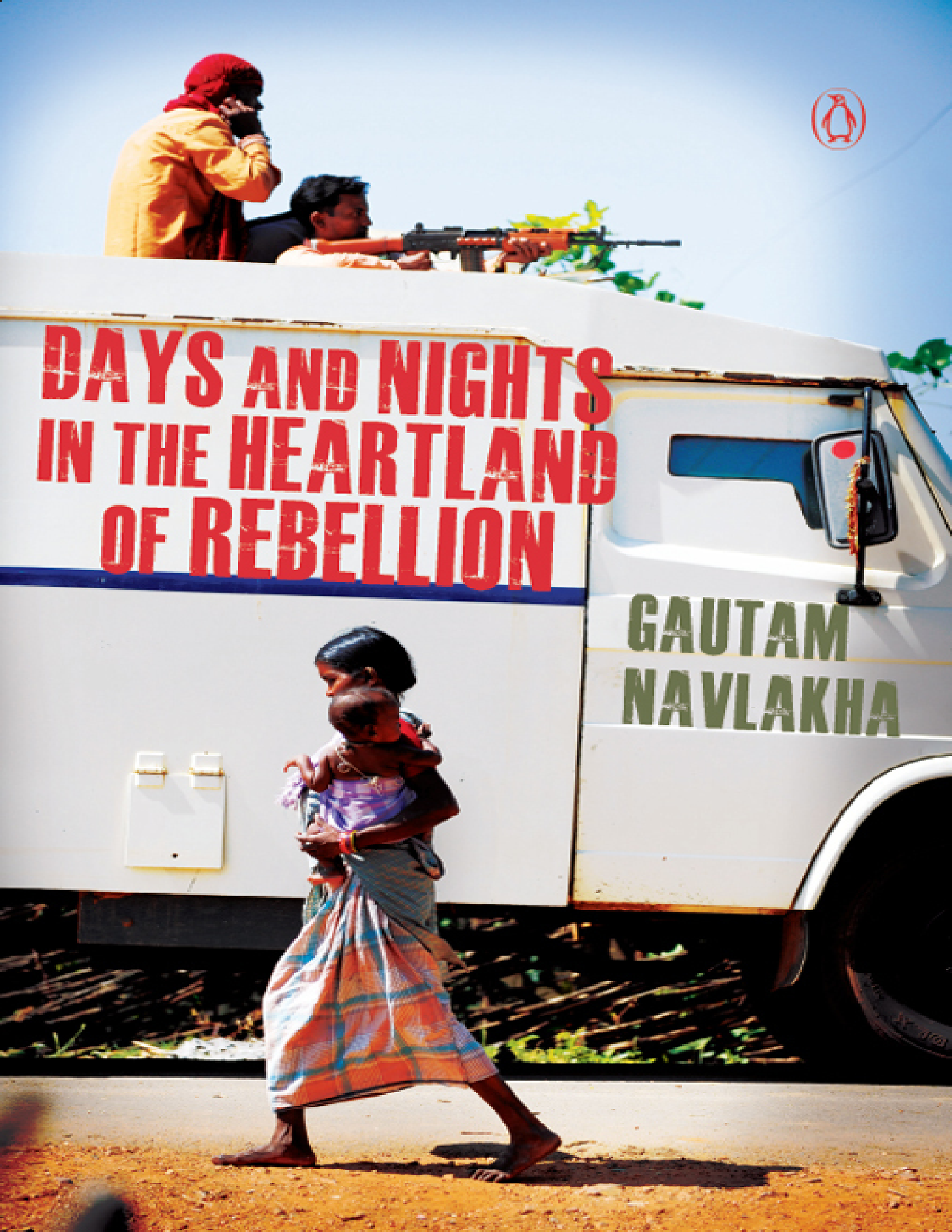
DAYS AND NIGHTS
IN THE HEARTLAND
OF REBELLION
GAUTAM
NAVLAKHA

Penguin

GAUTAM NAVLAKHA

Days and Nights in the Heartland of the Rebellion

PENGUIN BOOKS

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DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE HEARTLAND OF REBELLION

Gautam Navlakha is a civil liberties activist working for the non-funded Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (Delhi) and was associated with *Economic and Political Weekly* for more than three decades. He lives in New Delhi.

In memory of Krishna Raj, editor of Economic and Political Weekly *(1969–2004), my colleague, mentor and friend*

‘The tempestuous years of 1967–72 have shown how superficial is the serenity of the Indian countryside; it conceals the inflammability of the desperate, hungry masses—the smouldering fuse that is laboriously winding its way to the wild explosive that will shatter the present order. It threatens the ruling powers with forebodings of a fatal judgment.’

—Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*

Preface

I woke up with the moon shining bright on my face. During the fifteen-day journey every night I saw the moon grow in size. From new moon to full moon, a fortnight was now coming to an end. Tonight would be full moon. It was 3.30 a.m. and I could not sleep. I sat up. It was the day we were to return. My heart felt heavy. I heard Jan stir next to me. He asked me, 'Is something wrong?' I said, 'I am not able to fall asleep. I feel sad wondering if I will get to see "them" again. Will these young women and men with whom I spent days and nights be still around? The party members we got to know and with whom we shared so much—talking, arguing and discussing so frankly—will I get to meet them again?' Jan said, 'Yes, it's been quite remarkable meeting all of them, and I for one have been treated as a grandfather, rather strange for someone like me who comes from Sweden, you know.' 'But listen,' he said, 'you can still return, whereas I am not only getting old but also do not think that I will be allowed to return.'

We sat talking in whispers. But the feeling did not disappear. Just when it was time for us to bid goodbye at the 'border' Niti came up to me and said, '*Bhai, mujhe bahut bura lag raha hai ki aap log ja rahe ho*.' (Brother, I feel bad that you all are leaving today.) I said that is our feeling too. She added, '*Hum yahi baat kar rahe the ki John sir se kabhi milna nahin hoga. Lekin aap vapas aaoge na?*' (We were discussing that we might not meet John Sir ever again, but you will come again, won't you?) I told her she could count on me that I will never give up trying to make my way back there to see them.

I meant every word. What a tragedy it would be if these men and women were to die at the hands of security forces that neither know nor appreciate the motivation of these courageous young people—

what the party means to them, why they took up arms, what they have achieved, why they joined this resistance and what their dreams are.

When it comes to looking at military suppression by the Indian State there is a tendency to read it as less than a war. The reason we do not perceive it as war is because it takes place within the borders of the 'nation state' where deployment of 'Armed Forces of the Union' is considered legitimate, whatever be the reason. For instance, if one equates the promotion of mining and industrialization with 'development', then those who oppose this can be projected as 'unlawful' and accused of disloyalty and treason and therefore designated as 'enemy'. Never mind that the government and corporations feel free to acquire land through force and fraud. Those who organize resistance against this either face annihilation through military operations or get incapacitated by charges of sedition and 'waging war', stripped of their right to expression and association. And yet, it cannot be denied that it is *our people* who are being militarily suppressed.

The Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations brought out by the Integrated Headquarters in the Ministry of Defence (Army)[1] points out that in sub-conventional warfare there is a blurring of distinction between 'front and rear; strategic and tactical; combatants and non-combatants'.[2] Therefore, there 'is a need to change a soldier's mindset from fighting the "enemy" in a conventional conflict, for which he is trained, to fighting his "own people".'[3] At another place the doctrine lays down what is expected from fighting one's own people and says that ' . . . the military operations should aim firstly, at *neutralizing all hostile elements* in the conflict zone that oppose or retard the peace initiatives and secondly, at *transforming the will and attitudes of the people . . .* The endeavour should be *to bring about a realization* that fighting the government is a "no win" situation and that their anti-government stance will only delay the return of peace and normalcy. Therefore, *distancing from the terrorists is in their own interest and the only plausible course of action*. However, the

manifestation of such a realization can take from a couple of years to decades as attitudes take time to form and to change [emphasis mine].'[4]

The actual conduct of such wars of suppression brings out the brutal nature of this form of warfare. It invariably involves disappearance, detention, torture, rape and a very high incidence of killings, with rare instances of justice. Therefore, when every abuse has been employed against the Maoists/Naxalites—when they are diagnosed, dissected and demonized—we would still be compelled to answer some fundamental questions: Why this war? Who are these 'single biggest threat' to India's internal security? What is their politics? Why do they justify violence? How do they perceive their People's War (PW), their political goals and themselves? How do they intend to take a leap from their forest strongholds into the world outside?

There is also more than one side in a war. To claim that only one warring side has the right to propagate its views whereas the other does not because they are projected as 'enemy' makes even less sense in a situation of internal war where both sides comprise our own people. Therefore, a desire to humanize the demonized, and to get to know the Maoists first hand—not just through sporadic conversations, books, documents but to travel and meet and see for myself—had been building up for many years. Twice I came close to making the trip. The first time I was let down by two young journalists who failed to show up at the rendezvous. Another time I was unable to prepare myself at short notice. I was not going to miss out on this third opportunity. Although what is called the guerrilla zone is still an area of contention and control between the government and the rebels, it is nevertheless an area where the Indian State has been forced to retreat and is using military force to re-establish its authority.

This book is based on a fortnight long visit in January 2010 to what the Maoists describe as a guerrilla zone in Bastar where they run their Janatam Sarkar (JS) or the people's government. It comprises three sections. The first section provides some insight into the

reasons for this war, the politics of war and tries to bring out the salient features of the condition prevailing in the region of war. The second section is based on my observations, interactions as well as interviews with cadres of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and documents provided to me to read. I try here to also provide a short history of the evolution of the movement in the Dandakaranya region of Central India, in order to contextualize their achievements and the significance of what I saw, heard, discussed and debated. The third and final section provides my impressions of the Maoist-led movement, analyses the issue of violence and discusses the challenges as well as the prospects of the movement.

Freedom of expression means the right to express one's views and share one's perspective and to engage critically with perspectives one regards as valuable and worthy. I believe law, which the government and their acolytes cite to suppress views contrary to theirs, is illegitimate. Law and legitimacy are two different things. Legitimacy is decided by factors beyond the law and based on the notion of consent. 'It is not law which makes man but man who makes law,' said Marx. Bad or unjust laws need to be challenged because they confer power on authorities which are illegitimate and where their own subjective discretion is allowed free play.

In trying to humanize the Maoist movement, there is a likelihood of lapsing into demonizing the Indian State. This may indeed happen because there is an ideological affinity which makes me positively inclined towards popular movements, in particular to the resistance led by the Maoists. Conversely, I am less enamoured of the Indian State. Also, the vantage point from where I comprehend social reality is that of a democratic rights activist invariably confronted with acts of omission and commission of the State or persons in authority who often obstruct us from carrying out our mandate to probe violations of people's rights. We also remain at the receiving end of malicious propaganda of the authorities, political parties and sections of the corporatized media; all of this makes for powerful bias on my part.

So how does one ensure that my impressions are not tainted by make-believe or manufactured facts? All I can say is this: Once a

book is out in the public domain it is the reader who decides, whether what is written, even if partisan, appears truthful or not, whether facts described can be cross-verified? Did I pose questions which sought to elicit response not necessarily complimentary about the Maoists? Do the arguments appear reasonable? Are the readers persuaded to pause and ponder over the policy of military suppression being pursued against the Maoists by the Central and state governments?

Introduction

Truth, it is said, is the first casualty of war. What Sumanta Bannerjee wrote about the 1967–72 phase of the Naxalbari uprising is as true now as it was then. The war to suppress the Naxalites/Maoists happened then, as it is happening now. If land reform and land distribution galvanized the people then, this time around people are resisting the takeover of their sources of livelihood and of common resources. It is also not surprising, therefore, that the Indian government denies the very fact of prosecuting a war against the Communist Party of India (Maoist). On 17 June 2010, in Jharkhand's Korhat Forest, a force of more than 2000 backed by helicopters swooped on a Maoist camp guarded by a company (sixty to seventy personnel) of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). During 25–27 September 2010 in Saranda Forest, Jharkhand, 5000 joint force personnel, i.e., regiment strength, attacked a Maoist camp which had two companies of the PLGA (up to 150 members) for their own security. Helicopter gunships were reportedly used in the attack. Yet, it is said that the Indian government is merely carrying out 'police action' to restore civil administration in areas where 'Left-Wing Extremists' had launched a People's War against the Indian State to overthrow the constitutional order. The Indian army's annexation of Hyderabad in 1948 too was described as 'police action'. Official explanations are not sacrosanct. They are not meant to convey the truth. Most often they attempt to cover up the reality and obscure it.

If the war is called 'police action' it brings the image of lightly armed police personnel trying to restore order in a riotous situation. Whereas in actual fact there are seventy-five battalions (bns) of Central Para Military Forces (CPMFs) trained along the line of the

Indian Army's infantry formations, which are then taught the skills to fight jungle warfare. They are assisted by more than 100 bns of state-armed constabularies, the Indian Reserve bns, the 27,363 Special Police Officers (SPOs) and the Indian Air Force providing logistics, all of them armed with lethal weapons, which have been deployed in this new war terrain covering thirty-four districts across nine states of the Indian Union. It was Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil who described the 25,000-strong Central force deployed against the 'LWE (Left-Wing Extremism)' as 'an army of a small state' on the floor of the Lok Sabha on 1 March 2006: an 'army' fighting its own people. Thus 'police action' acquires a different poignancy on closer scrutiny.[1]

In order to prepare the way for eventual army engagement, four unified commands were proposed to be headed by the chief secretary, with a retired major general acting as a security adviser to the respective state governments. It ran into a peculiar problem. The military adviser to the ministry of home affairs (MHA) was a retired brigadier whereas the chief ministers were to be advised by retired major generals! Given the rank consciousness among army officers, even those no longer in service, this move was stalled for the time being. But the Indian Army chief advised his senior officers to be 'mentally prepared to step into the fight against Naxalism . . . *It might be in six months or in a year or two* [emphasis mine] but if we have to maintain our relevance as a tool of the state, we will have to undertake things that the nation wants us to'.[2] Talking about the so-called field firing range in Narayanpur in Chhattisgarh, a one-page press note[3] issued by the army headquarters says:

> [T]his will be the first time that any sizable strength of the Army moves into this region. The deployment will indeed open up the region to the outside world. Purchase of local materials and supplies will bring jobs and finance to cash strapped villages. The presence of the Army will also bring feeling of security in the villages.

At the same time the army also publicly maintained that they were against fighting 'our own people'. It is of course a different matter that the army chief defended army operations against Kashmiris,

Nagas, Meitis and Assamese. One presumes that they are not ‘our own people’. But such statements do not appear to mean that the army is refusing to get engaged.

The fact is that the army’s footprint is enlarging in the new war zone for eventual involvement in yet another war against our own people. In Chhattisgarh the army is setting up a sub-area or brigade headquarters in Raipur, a training facility in Bilaspur and a battle manoeuvre range in Narayanpur (near Abujmaad Forest). For this it has been given an area spread over 500 square kilometres in violation of the Fifth Schedule, Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (1996) and the Forest Rights Act (2006). Furthermore, the Central government plans to raise a Territorial Army battalion comprising tribals. It also intends to set up military stations or training centres including at Saraipali and Chakarbhatha in Chhattisgarh, which—together with brigade-level army presence at Narayanpur—will mean year-round presence of the army personnel in this new warzone. Also on the cards is a proposal to raise additional battalions of the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) by the army for deployment against the Maoists. This proposal to raise RR bns was the army’s response to the MHA’s request to transfer some of the sixty-six RR bns for operations against the Maoists which the army refused. They claimed that this would weaken the ‘security grid’ in place in Jammu and Kashmir.[4] So, while publicly the army does not want to fight ‘our own people’ (at least not without the immunity provided by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act) it has formally sought ‘Rules for Engagement’ from the state government to meet contingencies which are bound to arise since their battle range is deliberately located in the conflict zone. The reason is that army personnel are trained to respond immediately to any perceived or real threat. They are trained to fire first and ask questions later. ‘Kill or get killed’ is the rule that guides them. Given this reality, they want the rules of war to apply under which a soldier cannot be tried for murder.

Unlike in the past, Maoist guerrillas today are better trained and have shown adeptness in mobile guerrilla attacks as exemplified by the looting of armouries, freeing prisoners from jail and causing

much embarrassment to the counter-insurgency COBRA units of the CRPF, particularly in Chhattisgarh. Some of their operations have been audacious and fairly large such as Nayagarh, Koraput, Monghyr, etc., as well as the Jehanabad and Dantewada jailbreak. This has involved 200–500 guerrillas travelling over a large territory, preparing for months, taking villagers into confidence and then disappearing as swiftly as the objective was realized. Recall the words of the Indian PM on 20 December 2007 at the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security:

> [N]ot a day passes without an incident of Left Wing Extremism taking place somewhere or the other. Over the last year, the activities of Naxal groups have revealed new aspects. They seem to have developed the *capability* in some areas *to launch frontal attacks* on police forces and establishments. They are certainly targeting all aspects of economic activity. They are *targeting* vital economic infrastructure so as to *cripple* transport and logistic capabilities and also *slow down* any development activity [emphasis mine].

Besides the government forces deployed against the Maoists, there are extraordinary laws, Central as well as at the state level, which give enormous powers to the security administration to silence the critics of government policies. The ministry of home affairs declared on 6 May 2010 through a press note that anyone found 'supporting' Maoists could be prosecuted under Section 39 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. It goes on to say that the 'general public are informed to be extremely vigilant of the propaganda of CPI (Maoist) and not unwittingly become a victim of such propaganda'. The PM at his press conference on 24 May 2010 did clarify that '[i]n a democracy everyone is entitled to express their views and should face no restriction so long as they do not engage in advocacy for violence'. While this remark appears to be an endorsement for freedom of expression, it is not clear what he meant when he says that 'so long as they [people] do not engage in advocacy for violence'. Does support for use of violence by the State fall within this caveat? Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram opined that the Indian government had a 'legitimate right' to use 'as much

force as necessary' against the Maoists.[5] But doesn't retaining the present order of things—which includes by its very definition the prevailing state of inequalities and disparities, which exposes large sections of our people to a short lifespan—not amount to promotion of violence? Moreover, if I advocate an overthrow of this system 'peacefully if possible and violently if necessary', do I become an advocate of violence? Does the right to resist oppression, but not the infliction of oppression itself, become advocacy of violence? Why is it that even when structural violence (hunger, malnourishment, etc.—a form of violence attributed to the fallout of policies or their absence) is acknowledged, it does not acquire the same poignancy and revulsion which political violence attributed to Maoists attracts?

It seems all right for the Union home secretary to tell the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs on 4 April 2012 that '[w]ithin the close confines of this room, if I am discussing this with the DG of CRPF separately, my preference would be to arrest or kill as many armed Naxalites as possible'. How sick we have become in our pursuit of bloodletting! Newspapers wrote that there is approval for such a stance among politicians cutting across party lines. Thus politicians, retired and serving bureaucrats, retired and serving armed forces personnel and corporate media can first claim that Maoists are our 'enemy' and then demand pitting the 'might of the Indian State' against them, call for aerial bombing or deployment of the army, push the demand for 'wiping them out', 'finishing them off ', 'getting rid of the menace'. Or simply to 'kill them'. Such people are unmindful of the consequences of escalating the war or contributing to the creation of a climate in which ruthless killings, torture, abuse and intimidation can thrive. Then why is it wrong for someone to extend support to the Maoists to defend the 'poorest of the poor' in the face of a savage war for 'development'? Is the violence of the State legitimate and that of the people a crime, notwithstanding the nature and scale of State violence or the context within which people feel compelled to pick up arms?

An extraordinary control regime is in place, which, among other things, regulates entry and exit into areas held by the Maoist

guerrillas. Civil liberties and media activists are denied access to these war zones. This was brought out dramatically in March 2011 when Swami Agnivesh and two disciples of Sri Sri Ravishankar along with the sub-divisional magistrate were attacked by Salwa Judum activists in their new avatar as Koya Commandos. They were proceeding towards the three villages near Chintalnar (Morpalli, Timarpur and Tadmetla) in Dantewada where Koya Commandos and security forces had engaged in arson, loot, rape and murder of villagers during 11–16 March 2011. These SPOs operate under the protection of senior police officers notorious for their proficiency in the counter-insurgency policy which prevails in a war zone—where India's constitutional order does not operate and Supreme Court judgments are treated with contempt. In district after district a roll call of officers would throw up a list featuring several who-is-who's of ill-repute. Consider that in Chhattisgarh an alleged rapist, killer, arsonist and commander of Salwa Judum, Kartam Surya, was sheltered in a police camp even as the police declared to the court that they could not track him. But when he was killed by the Maoists on 9 February 2012 he was eulogized by the Chhattisgarh Police as a 'Chhattisgarh hero' and praised for his 'ruthlessness' in dealing with Maoists. So powerful and immune have police forces become in states where 'operation green hunt' is being waged that the home minister of the BJPled state government of Chhattisgarh, lamented before the press on 12 February 2012 that the state police do not listen to him or follow his orders. Not one newspaper or electronic channel showed any interest in this matter, which tells its own story of how indifferent they are to the police becoming a lawless force in the name of fighting Maoists.

The extent to which lawlessness is cultivated by the rulers can also be gauged from the complaint filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which was inquiring into the attack on Swami Agnivesh and his convoy in March 2011 under the order of the Supreme Court. According to the *Times of India*[6], the CBI team came under attack from SPOs (now renamed as District Auxiliary Force) armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades in

September 2011. The SPOs also manhandled the Superintendent of Police (SP), Sukma, and other police personnel who tried to intervene to protect the CBI officers.

The local population must carry identity cards signed by the SP or else they can neither enter into nor exit from the area. Movement of goods too has been curtailed. Weekly markets have been relocated inside or close to local security camps where one has to register oneself and provide a list of members for whom ration is needed, in order to have access to provisions which cannot last for more than a week. In the forest, people earlier had to walk for a few hours to reach the weekly haat but now a full day, even two, are needed because of the relocation of the haat and the encumbrances (ID cards, check-post, registration at camps, search of bags) imposed.

Such is the extent of control exercised by the security forces in conflict zones that Chhattisgarh Police accused the Indian Red Cross Society and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) of committing a 'heinous' crime—providing medical aid to Maoists who fall sick or are injured.[7] The 'illiteracy' of the officer cadre of the Indian Police and security forces is such that they are oblivious to the principles of war enshrined in the Geneva Convention and Protocols, which oblige the protagonists in any armed conflict to allow medical aid for both combatants and civilians.[8] The Indian Supreme Court too in several judgments has pointed out that doctors are obliged to treat any person who comes to them for treatment. Presumably, 'ignorance is bliss' for the functionaries of the Indian State.

The paranoia of the state governments is such that they have been busy invoking sedition (Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code) as well as the charge of 'waging war' against the State (Section 121 of the IPC) on trade unionists, peasant activists and civil right activists. The reason for cracking down on social activists and civil rights activists is straightforward. All news flow from war zones must be 'regulated' in such a way that the public does not become wise to the horrors of the dirty war being prosecuted by the government forces. Therefore, when People's Union for Civil Liberties began to expose the massacres, rapes and other heinous crimes committed

by the security forces under the garb of Salwa Judum, the authorities decided to teach them a lesson for daring to highlight crimes committed by the government forces and agencies. A sessions court in Raipur (Chhattisgarh) pronounced life sentence, under charges of sedition, on Dr Binayak Sen, tendu leaf contractor Piyush Guha and the politburo member of CPI (Maoist). If this judgment is read with the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Chhattisgarh Public Security Act, we can find the police–judiciary–ruling party (in this instance, BJP) nexus. One can see how this operates to censor, curb and coerce into silence all those who expose the entrails of the war being waged by the Indian State against the adivasis led by the CPI (Maoist). With the prosecution's own witnesses questioning the evidence and relying entirely on the police testimonies, the trial court judge sentenced all three to life imprisonment. It was as though the judge accepted the charge sheet in toto and, therefore, need not have wasted public money by going through the motions of a trial.

Free Fall

The war against people has begun exhibiting features of lawlessness. At the ground level civil administration dare not function against the wishes of the security personnel. There is no protection for civilian administration from the wrath of SPOs who operate as virtually private armies of the powerful security force officers. If schools and health centres do not run in the war zones it is primarily because teachers, health workers and other social workers are prevented and dissuaded from working in interior villages by the security agencies. Their loyalty is suspect. Anyone who is literate and wants to work amongst his/her own people is a suspect. The 'security' mindset perceives them as potential Maoists. Thus lawlessness is actively encouraged by the government as a way by which terror can be unleashed on people in the conflict zone to drive home the point that support or sympathy for the rebels—in this case, Maoists—carries a price tag. This lawlessness is getting compounded by a kind of laissez-faire political approach. The BJP has taken the war against the Maoists to another level by virtually conducting its own foreign and military policy. The decision of the BJP to send a high-powered delegation to Israel led by its party president—to discuss Israeli assistance for anti-Maoist operations being carried out by its governments in Chhattisgarh, MP, Jharkhand and Karnataka—is a prime illustration of this. BJP President Nitin Gadkari, who led the party delegation to Israel, said the Israeli homeland security services could explore ways to cooperate with the National Democratic Alliance-led state governments facing Maoist menace. Gadkari made this suggestion to the Israeli agencies after a presentation was made to his delegation and he in turn advised the Israeli homeland security services to organize special presentations

for Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar—state governments facing the challenge of Maoist violence, as per the press communiqué issued by the BJP in New Delhi on 17 December 2010.[9]

The BJP and its ally in Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal, used the anti-Naxal hysteria to crack down on trade unions and peasant activists. In Gujarat the BJP government used the bogey of Naxalites to arrest trade union and social activists and charged them under the UAPA for being members of banned LWE parties. (It's a different matter that so gross was the attempt that the sessions court found compelling reasons to release all the accused.) Congress governments in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra too have not lagged behind in the suppression of Naxalites/ Maoists and in arresting, torturing and accusing activists of sedition and treason as well as foisting numerous cases in different police stations (a tactic used by right-wing Hindutva goons who register complaints and move court against targeted persons in different parts of the country). The Congress-led AP government condoned the custodial killing of Cherukuri Rajkumar, aka Azad, and Hem Chandra Pandey on 2 July 2010 at Wankidi (Adilabad) by the Andhra Pradesh State Intelligence Bureau, knowing well that Azad was engaged in talks to explore possibilities of cessation of hostilities and dialogue with the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA)-appointed emissary Swami Agnivesh. It was on direction of the apex court that a CBI inquiry into the alleged encounter took place ten months after the incident. But it also reveals that more than eighteen months after the cold-blooded murders, CBI has done a hatchet job. It seems a carte blanche exists for the annihilation of Maoist leaders as Azad's killing was followed fifteen months later by the custodial torture and murder of Kishanji, another Maoist leader, this time in West Bengal, when efforts were afoot to explore prospects of dialogue between the Trinamool Congress-led state government and the Maoists.

Even the Left Front government in West Bengal was not laggard and used the attempted assassination of its chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in November 2008 to not only lend full support to the war against the people of Jangalmahal, in the name of

fighting Maoists, but have also used draconian laws such as the UAPA to silence dissent. West Bengal became the first state where a person detained under the UAPA, Swapan Dasgupta, editor of Bengali *People's March*, a registered pro-Maoist magazine, was left to die while in police custody. The Left Front has also pressed its own armed cadres (popularly called Harmads), which was permitted by the joint forces comprising the Central and state paramilitary forces, from openly operating because they were considered as providing 'local resistance'. As a result political violence in West Bengal, as the elections to the state Assembly drew close in 2011, perceptibly increased with figures of dead reaching 189 between March 2009 and October 2010. Of these, ninety-six belonged to the Trinamool Congress, sixty-five to the CPM and fifteen to the Congress party. This is two and a half times the number of persons, seventy-nine, alleged to have been killed by Maoists in the Jangalmahal area in the corresponding period. And in contrast to political violence in West Bengal unleashed by political parties for electoral domination, Maoist killings occurred in the context of joint security forces operations to suppress them.

The scale of the propaganda and the generosity shown by the Central government to roll out funds for anti-Naxal/ Maoist operations by relaxing rules governing disbursement of money is so large that state government after state government began stoking the fear of Maoists and Naxalites in order to get access to easy funding for their police forces. This list includes the Jammu and Kashmir state government! In other words, stoking Maoist/Naxal fear has become a lucrative business for various agencies of the State to corner public funds.

Why the War?

But the question still remains: why is the Indian State prosecuting this war? Do the Maoists pose a grave threat to internal security? Could there have been another, less muscular, approach for the government to adopt?

According to the Intelligence Bureau, there are about 3000 main (PLGA) and secondary (local guerrilla squads) forces and 30,000 base (People's Militia) force.[10] Although citing the very same IB,[11] it was claimed that the number of Maoist armed cadres was 5600! This would imply that there has been a reduction in the size of their force. In a report published by Stratfor,[12] author Ben West points out that the '[l] ocal Indian media sources report that Naxalite forces have an arsenal of approximately 20,000 weapons— an average of two weapons per soldier'. And the report, 'Genesis and Spread of Maoist Violence' by the Bureau of Police Research prepared by D.M. Mitra (IPS) and principal adviser to the Madhya Pradesh Planning Commission, says that the strength of Maoist cadres varies between 10,000, 15,000 and 25,000. In other words their exact number is difficult to establish. However, they are supposed to have spread to 190 out of 627 districts in India, albeit violence is reported only from 10 per cent of the police stations in nine states. The report cautions that their presence gets 'exaggerated'.[13] Whatever be the actual strength of the armed cadres of the Maoists—and even accepting that they pose a challenge to the Indian State's authority—it is a gross exaggeration to project them as a *threat* poised to overthrow the State either in the short or the medium term, even if it is the ardent desire of the Maoists.

Besides, the bulk of the weapons used by the Maoists are those looted from the armouries or from security force personnel during

ambushes. Thus the type of weapons and the size of their weapon arsenal are also known in turn by the authorities. This rebel force spread over thirty-four districts of nine states becomes a very thin force, hardly capable of being designated as the ‘single biggest threat to internal security’. If the strength of this rebel force is contrasted with several hundred thousand strong private militia—such as Bajrang Dal of the RSS which openly receives support of State authorities and indeed even the security forces—including in ‘disturbed’ areas of Jammu and Kashmir, then the moot point is how and why Maoists became such a big threat.

The build-up towards this phase of war against the Naxalites/Maoists began in 1998 when for the first time the ministry of home affairs, then under BJP leader LK Advani, began speaking about the threat posed by the Maoists/ Naxalites and under his ministership reference was dropped to the socio-economic roots of Left rebellion, which had its origin in the demand for land reforms. The issue of land and land reforms, including land to the landless, has a long history and goes back to India’s freedom struggle where peasant movements had raised the demand for land reforms and distribution as a key component of the democratic reform of the country post transfer of power. Decoupling the socio-economic reality from the revolutionary movement was to develop into a project of preparing for war.

In 1999–2000 the annual report of the MHA shifted focus to ‘plan and execute coordinated action to contain and ultimately eliminate the scourge of left wing extremist violence . . .’ Gradually over the years the reference to them became more strident. By 2003–04 the MHA began to speak of creating ‘local resistance group at grass root levels’. The same annual report went on to say:

> Recent developments in Jharkhand where Communist Party Marxist Leninist-Peoples War encountered strong resistance from villagers in Lango village, P.S. Dumara, District East Singhbhum show a strong anti-naxal feeling among sections of villagers. This feeling *needs to be harnessed and channelized in making people’s resistance groups to counter the atrocities committed by the naxalite outfits. There is a*

> *need to encourage and promote these local resistance groups* [emphasis mine].

And within three months of the Congress-led UPA government coming to power in May 2004, on 11 August 2004, the MHA officials were briefing the members of the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs that Naxalites/Maoists pose an even 'bigger threat' than the 'Islamic fundamentalist groups . . .' It also became clear that there existed a consensus between the BJP and the Congress on waging war against the Maoists.

On 20 December 2007 at the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security, the prime minister of India in his opening speech raised the pitch when he said, 'As we survey the national security scenario, there are a few aspects which are cause of concern. I wish to highlight a few of them.' He began by referring to the 'Left Wing Extremism' that continues 'to affect many districts of our country'. He went on,

> Just a few days ago, we had a major incident of a jailbreak in Chhattisgarh.[14] This was not an isolated incident. Not a day passes without an incident of Left Wing Extremism taking place somewhere or the other. Over the last year, the activities of naxal groups have revealed new aspects. They seem to have developed the capability in some areas to launch frontal attacks on police forces and establishments. They are certainly targeting all aspects of economic activity. They are targeting vital economic infrastructure so as to cripple transport and logistic capabilities and also slow down any development activity. This helps them sustain their ideology of deprivation and neglect. They have even managed to eliminate some important political leaders and their associates in some states.

Therefore, the PM went on to say, 'we cannot rest in peace until we have eliminated this virus'. He said '[w]e need to cripple the hold of naxalite forces with all means at our command' adding that '[w]hile tackling naxal groups militarily, we also need to choke their support infrastructure'. After this muscular and baleful tone, the PM pinned the blame on 'LWE' for slowing down economic activity in order to 'sustain their ideology'. Of course he remained silent about the sixty

years of deprivation and neglect of adivasis by successive Indian governments.

At the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security on 6 January 2009 in New Delhi, the Indian prime minister shed the macho tone vis-à-vis the Naxalites/Maoists by saying that they are 'primarily indigenous and home grown'. While he pointed out that the CPI (Maoist) is 'perhaps the only militant organization in the country which has its own Guerrilla Army, though, as yet, this is of '*modest proportions* [emphasis mine]', he also said that they 'show increasing sophistication in the way they carry out attacks. They also do not seem to have any dearth of new recruits to the movement'. He then went on to say that 'as the movement spreads, and becomes more energized and active, we must ponder deeply on how best to effectively deal with it. This is so, as the movement still retains a modicum of ideological appeal. It is still able to garner support from among members of Civil Society and Civil Liberties organizations. It still attracts sections of youth'. He cautioned: 'Choosing the right methods and adopting a proper strategy are therefore important so that the action we take does not give a greater fillip to the growth of the movement.' While the rhetoric was toned down from the stridency expressed in 2006, there was, nevertheless, a conspicuous absence of any reference to the life experience of people fighting a bitter struggle over land, water and forests.

In other words, there is a need to look closely at what the persons in authority have to say because the recurring theme is that India's growth story is under threat. On 6 September 2010 the prime minister told a select group of editors that 'Naxalite areas happen to be those areas which are heartland of India's mineral wealth . . . if we are not allowed to exploit the mineral resources of this country I think the growth path of this country will be adversely affected.'

Also worth keeping in mind is what the PM said at the Conference on Implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006, held on 4 November 2009:

> [T]here has been a systematic failure in giving the tribals a stake in the modern economic processes that inexorably intrude into their

> living spaces. The alienation built over decades is now taking a dangerous turn in some parts of our country. The systematic exploitation and social and economic abuse of our tribal communities can no longer be tolerated. But the fact is that no sustained activity is possible under the shadow of the gun. *Nor have those who claim to speak for the tribals offered an alternate economic or social path that is viable* [emphasis mine].

The link between what the corporate sector is greedy for and the need to assuage enraged people resisting land grab, displacement, etc., by dangling some ‘concessions’ or show of hypocritical concern is clearly evident. The former is the strategic objective and the latter tactical concession. Which is to say that war is the strategy and concessions are tactics. Thus the war on Maoists is not because they are on the cusp of overthrowing the presently constituted Indian State, a task in which they have been engaged for nearly half a century. By their own admission it will take them a long time to succeed. Besides, by 2005 the Maoists had suffered grievous losses in Andhra Pradesh, which nearly wiped them out. The same year also saw the initiation of Salwa Judum (Peace Hunt) in Chhattisgarh, which further debilitated the Maoists. Arming sections of local people comprising disgruntled elements of the once-dominant tribal elite, local non-tribal contractors and business persons and extreme right-wing Hindutva cadres was a conscious policy decision of the government which was passed off as ‘people’s resistance’.

As recently as on 15 September 2009, the prime minister told a meeting of director generals of police (DGPs) and inspector generals of police (IGPs) that Maoist military capabilities are of ‘modest proportions’. In the very same meeting the Union home minister pointed out that they have ‘pockets’ of influence in twenty states across the country and that out of a total of 14,000-plus police stations, 2000—15 per cent of the area covering a population of roughly 150 million—are affected. However, he also added that ‘violence afflicts’ 400 police stations in thirteen states, i.e., less than 3 per cent of the total number of police stations in the country are affected by it. Place this against the fact that the Maoist-influenced area comprises 5 per cent of the total land area and 2 per cent of

India's population resides here. It becomes abundantly clear that this is a war of aggression against our own people being fought for reasons other than those publicly projected.

If the size and spread of the armed cadres is not the criterion, could it be their wanton acts of violence which invites the wrath of the Indian State? This too seems improbable. Were one to compare the number of civilians who died at the hands of the Indian military or police forces since 1947—the nature and magnitude of violence against vulnerable sections of people, particularly women, Dalits, Muslims, adivasis . . . in which either agencies of the Indian State participated or stood by to allow Hindutva terror groups a free hand—then the killings by the so-called 'LWE' would pale in comparison.[15] And yet, more anger is directed at them than has ever been directed at the government forces or for that matter at the government-supported majoritarian right-wing organizations. Membership of an organization declared as a 'terrorist' organization under the UAPA automatically turns every member of that group into an offender, never mind whether any criminal act followed from their membership. But how have terror campaigns by persons who belong to the RSS and its decision-making bodies not attracted the arm of law? The vast membership of Hindutva groups in India faces no restraint. This despite the seven-decade-long impeccable record of the RSS—and its progenies such as VHP and Bajrang Dal members—in massacre, rape, plunder and loot, as well as for the crime of pushing Muslims to take to desperate measures as a result of the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the Gujarat genocide, including winking at their own Hindutva ranks to carry out terror attacks against Muslims.

So what distinguishes the parliamentary parties from the Maoists? The difference, presumably, is that the crimes attributed to Maoists get magnified because they believe in overthrowing and transforming the State and society by capturing power. On the other hand, crimes of pro-establishment parties, from the BJP to the Congress and the CPI (M) get blunted because they believe in maintaining the present order of things. Elections have acquired the character of a dip in the

Ganga, which, devout believers say, washes off all sins. A senior leader of the BJP, Arun Jaitley, during the course of the debate in the Parliament over the scams that hit UPA II and responding to the PM's argument of UPA II having received the people's mandate through elections, asked quite pertinently, 'Does criminality get extinguished because of electoral wins?' Yet, he did not think of applying the same logic to his party colleague Narendra Modi, the CM of Gujarat, or other worthies of the 'sangh parivar'. For the status-quoist parties 'sauce for the goose is *not* sauce for the gander'.

There is a cruel oddity that does not cease to bewilder. The unprecedented scale of malnourishment in India among children in the age group of 0 to 6 is well known. It is known that two years of malnutrition can cause irreparable damage to the cognitive abilities of a child. This means that nearly 50 per cent of our children are condemned to a cruelly deprived existence. We also know that 43 per cent of Indian women are anaemic. The national vice-president of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Dr Binayak Sen, pointed out while delivering the sixth I.G. Khan Memorial Lecture on 'Violence and Justice in Our Times' at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on 13 March 2010 that the action against Maoists is only accentuating the problem of malnutrition in tribal areas. The military campaign against Maoists and the displacement of tribals, he underlined, would only make things worse. 'The government is displacing a large number of people from the very resource base that they are surviving on. Use of words like collateral damage by the government is dangerous as the Maoists don't carry a label on their head.' A person with a body mass index of less than 18.5 is malnourished. According to the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau, 33 per cent of adult Indians have a BMI of less than 18.5. If you disaggregate this, over 50 per cent of scheduled tribes, 60 per cent of scheduled castes and an equally high percentage of Muslims have a BMI of 18.5 or are undernourished. He went on to say that '[t]he WHO says that any community of which over 40 per cent population has a BMI of 18.5 per cent is in a state of famine. By that standard, many communities in India are living in a state of famine.

Orissa, whose 40 per cent population is undernourished, too, fits the bill'.

He also drew attention on 3 May 2010 while speaking to students of the Asian College of Journalism in Chennai that '[m]ost people think that genocide has to do with large scale direct killing, but the declaration of the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crimes of Genocide, issued on 9 December 1948, a day before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, tells us clearly that in addition to killing, the creation of "physical and mentally hazardous conditions" which could put the survival of particular communities at risk "would also come within the ambit of genocide". . . What is shocking is the inability of our leadership to read the writing on the wall . . . [Its Article 2 defines genocide as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a group, such as: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.'

If one reads the statistics on malnutrition with those on income disparities, according to which six decades after the 'Transfer of Power', 77 per cent of our working people survive on less than twenty rupees per day, it becomes clear that children of the working class face a cruel and a rather short lifespan. Using the definition above we can say that it is a genocidal policy that has been followed. Yet this painful and short lifespan inflicted on our people does not evoke anger and rage simply because it is not as spectacular an event. The media is indifferent unless it's an attack on a security force camp or the abduction of a gazetted officer of the State of India. In contrast, after six decades, 100 Indian families own wealth equivalent to 25 per cent of the national income. In 2011 according to *Forbes* magazine just fifty-seven dollar billionaires in India had a combined net worth of Rs 12,06,375 crore, representing 16 per cent of India's GDP of Rs 71,57,412 crore in 2010–11.

If someone were to conclude from this that the life of a working class Indian is not worth much, and that the rulers could not care less, how wrong would they be?

In such a situation compounded by unprecedented price rise and high unemployment with fall in the net income of working class Indians, why make things worse by prosecuting a war against our own people?

Primitive Accumulation

The process of dispossessing people of common resources people —whether taking away forests from forest dwellers or land from peasants, privatization and diversion of water, or exploitation of unorganized workers through no guarantee of permanent employment and miserably low wages—is the way in which extraordinary profits are reaped by owners of capital. This process of capital accumulation characterizes primitive accumulation. Prabhat Patnaik wrote in *EPW*[16] in favour of what he described as '*subversion of the logic of capital* [emphasis mine]' (i.e., checking the immanent tendency of capitalism to downgrade and displace petty producers, especially small traders, middle and rich peasants, and small capitalists). He wrote that this means

> preventing all direct forms of primitive accumulation of capital, such as the forcible dispossession of the peasants from their land for 'development', or the forcible curtailment of the activities of the fishermen; but it also means preventing less visible forms of primitive accumulation, such as through turning the terms of trade against peasants and petty producers.[17]

The large-scale annexation of the land of tribals and their displacement from forests through force and fraud set in motion resistance of people in different parts of the country. Looting of common resources of the people is one feature of the social reality. This process of primitive accumulation gets compounded by what Amit Bhaduri describes as

> an increasingly irreversible production structure in favour of the rich [which] begins to consolidate itself, because the investments embodied in the specific capital goods created to produce luxuries cannot easily be converted to producing basic necessities . . . Yet it is

> the logic of the market to direct investments towards the most productive and profitable sectors for ‘efficient allocation of resources’.[18]

For instance, the automobile sector, which accounts for nearly a quarter of the manufacturing sector in India, is dominated by private vehicles. Between 1951 and 2011 the number of buses compared to private vehicles (cars, two-wheelers, three-wheelers) declined from 11.1 per cent to 1.1 per cent, even as buses account for 50 per cent of all journeys performed by road transport.[19] In 2010 there were 40 million passenger vehicles out of 100 million vehicles registered. The production of cars, 3.7 million in 2010, will reach 5 million by 2015 and 9 million by 2020. It is estimated by 2050 there will be 611 million vehicles on India’s roads. In 2009–10 three-fourths of India’s oil production was for transportation in which passenger vehicles account for 60–70 per cent of the energy used. One can’t help notice the incongruity of favouring private vehicles owned by just 4.7 per cent of 247 million Indian households (as per the Houselisting and Housing Census 2011) over the public transport system in a country where 77 per cent live on less than Rs 20 per day. This push for private vehicles has implications for the rising demand for steel and in turn iron ore mines, diversion of land, forests, river water, and also the energy requirement, which is going to cross 170 million tonnes of crude oil imports in 2012. 50 per cent of this goes towards meeting transportation needs. This also impacts the environment, carries public health implications and costs, and affects road use by different social classes. Yet this irrational and wasteful policy is celebrated as the triumph of economic reform. Imagine that whereas Delhi boasts of 7.3 million vehicles there are only 32,800 buses. These buses carry 55–60 per cent of the total commuters whereas the cars, scooters, etc., carry no more than 15–20 per cent. This is supposed to be ‘development’.

Keeping this in mind, the Union ministry of rural development’s draft report—‘Committee on Agrarian Relations and Unfinished Tasks of Land Reforms’ (2009)— makes for enlightening reading. It refers to the fact that ‘[m]ost tribal areas in Central India are the

abode to the naxalites, whose presence is a response both to past and future land alienation, the failure of the government to live up to its constitutional mandate and the withdrawal of the state from its responsibility to protect the tribal realm'.

The report then explains the reason for Salwa Judum, which has a direct bearing on mining concessions:

> There was initial resistance (in 2000) to land acquisition and displacement from the tribals. The state withdrew its plans under fierce resistance. An argument put forward was 'you don't play foul with the Murias', it's a matter of life or death and Murias don't fear death. A new approach was necessary if the rich lodes of iron ore are to be mined.
>
> The new approach came about with the Salwa Judum, euphemistically meaning 'peace hunt'.[20] Ironically the Salwa Judum was led by Mahendra Karma, elected on a Congress ticket and the Leader of the Opposition and supported whole heartedly by the BJP led government. Salwa Judum was headed and peopled by Murias, some of them erstwhile cadres and local leaders of the Communist Party of India (Maoist). Behind them are the traders, contractors and miners waiting for a successful result of their strategy. The first financiers of the Salwa Judum were Tata and Essar in the quest for 'peace'. The first onslaught of the Salwa Judum was on Muria villagers who still owed allegiance to the Communist Party of India (Maoist). It turned out to be an open war between brothers. 640 villages as per official statistics were laid bare, burnt to the ground and emptied with the force of the gun and the blessings of the state. 350,000 tribals, half the total population of Dantewada district, are displaced, their womenfolk raped, their daughters killed, and their youth maimed. Those who could not escape into the jungle were herded together into refugee camps run and managed by the Salwa Judum. Others continue to hide in the forest or have migrated to the nearby tribal tracts in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.
>
> 640 villages (in Dantewada district) are empty. Villages sitting on tons of iron ore are effectively de-peopled and available for the highest bidder. The latest information that is being circulated is that both Essar Steel and Tata Steel are willing to take over the empty landscape and manage the mines.

Since 2004, the state government in Chhattisgarh has signed 102 MoUs and claims to have attracted Rs 1,65,000 crore of investment. Almost all focus was on the mineral industry and through private negotiations without any competitive bids. In the year 2002, 384 square kilometres in Hasdeo Arand were to be declared as forest. But in 2006 the state found 100 square kilometres coal block and recommended mineral concessions for a number of industrial houses. In June–July 2005 an MoU was signed with Tata for 5 million tonnes and with Essar for 3.2 million tonnes. Many concessions were given to parties which exist only on paper and some having received mining blocks sold them for a huge profit. It takes 1.8 million tonnes of iron ore to produce one million tonne of steel. Assuming that the market price for iron ore is Rs 3500 per tonne, the cost of captive mines comes to Rs 500 per tonne. This means a net benefit of Rs 2700 crore for Tata, Jindal and Essar annually.[21] Incidentally while the cost of mining iron ore per tonne is Rs 350, the market price for export in 2009–10 rose above Rs 6000 pt.[22] Royalty on iron ore remained Rs 7–27 per tonne (depending on the grade of iron ore) or less than 0.4 per cent. The beauty of this kind of loot is that in India royalty is calculated on the basis of what is called Pit Mine Value (PMV) and not Freight on Board (FOB). This means that the price of extracting minerals or the operating cost of extracting minerals determines the rate of royalty and not the sale price of minerals which includes all costs including freight, insurance and overheads, etc. The Karnataka Lokayukta's second report on 'Illegal Mining' talks about how whereas the cost of extraction of iron ore was around Rs 150/tonne, the royalty paid was just Rs 16.25 for an export price averaging Rs 4200—a profit rate of 2400 per cent for miners. Justice Santosh Hegde pointed out that during 2006–11, 3.29 lakh cases of illegal mining were reported. Just as Goa Assembly's public accounts committee observed that 43 per cent of the iron ore exported from Goa was illegal. Thus mining is a lucrative business as even legal mining companies end up paying lower royalty because the PMV calculation lowers the threshold.

By the way on 20 April, newspapers reported that despite a public exposé' of the mining scam, and the scrupulously prepared Karnataka Lokayukta report, the Supreme Court appointed central empowerment committee, after first saying wrongdoers should be made to pay five times the market value of the iron ore illegally extracted, changed its mind and proposed to the Court to impose Rs 5 crore per hectare as fine for illegal mining pits and Rs 1 crore per hectare for illegal dumping. It did not ask for the prosecution of a single official, politician or businessman involved in this scam. Thus 162 mines which operated in 'gross violation of laws' will resume their work. So much for bringing the culprits to book in a high-profile case.

Thus super-profits were waiting to be made. If Karnataka's BJP government was beholden to iron ore mining lords it was presumably because they controlled the purse strings. If allegations of overnight riches made by Madhu Koda or YSR Reddy are true, they stem from hitting the 'pot of gold' which mining represents. The extraordinary profits made 'legally' do not take into account the phenomenon of illegal mining (production in excess of licensed amount/mining in areas outside the licensed area) and illegal exports, which have been extremely lucrative and, as shown in Karnataka, iron ore mine barons with illegal production and illegal exports enjoy not only political protection but become kingmakers. A committee appointed by the Supreme Court to look into the phenomenon of illegal mining reported that during 2003–04 and 2009–10 a total of thirty million tonnes of iron ore were exported without valid permits from Karnataka. The value of these illegal exports was calculated at the nominal value of Rs 5000 per tonne of iron ore that was worth Rs 15,000 crore or $3.2 billion![23]The nexus between the corporate sector with politicians and bureaucrats is deep. Even media houses (the *Dainik Bhaskar* group in Chhattisgarh or the *Prabhat Khabar* group in Jharkhand) have now developed a stake in mining. Dependence of electronic channels and print media on investments by the corporate sector with stakes in a variety of sectors especially

mineral and oil to grab land for industry and real estate, etc., reduce the likelihood of exposing malpractices of the rich and the powerful.

Significantly, the Government of India was proposing a Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Bill 2010, which would oblige coal mining companies to share 26 per cent of net profit, calculated presumably on the basis of Pit Mine Value, with the local people whose land is acquired. But even such lowered-down profit sharing was unacceptable to the industry. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said that 'giving 26% of stake in equity or profits (is) not workable. It will discourage investment and drive down efficiency'. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) went on to claim that 'No shareholder would like to invest *where 26% of shareholders do not make any contribution to the company.* The adverse impact of this provision will be that raising funds will become difficult'.[24] Parting with one's source of livelihood and giving up their guarantee against the vagaries of life is not considered any 'contribution'.

Planning Commission Vice Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia lent his voice to this cacophony and opposed the new Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Bill 2010 by stressing that

> If we end up with too high a cumulative royalty burden with international standards, this will only discourage future investments in the mining sector. We cannot assume that the additional burden can simply be passed on to the consumer, since these minerals are freely importable and users will switch to imports.[25]

Finally, whereas 26 per cent of the profit from coal mining has to be shared with the local community whose land gets alienated for mining, for other minerals it was proposed that an amount equivalent to the royalty paid to the state government should be set aside for the benefit of the local community. Since royalty on minerals is abysmally low, roughly Rs 7–27 per tonne, mining companies would have to forgo a miniscule portion of their super-profits. Thus, the overwhelming reason for the war unleashed by the Indian government is because in the adivasi belt of Central and eastern India, corporations are avidly eyeing mining for coal, iron ore,

bauxite, etc., setting up integrated steel mills and aluminium smelter units, and privatizing water distribution to enable the industries to avail of nature's bounty for their near-exclusive needs and extraordinary profits. In short, the war is to enable the government to clear the forests and farms of resistance and hand them over to private corporations to exploit minerals, riding roughshod over protesting adivasis and peasants.[26]

That water figures in this scheme of things is illustrated by the fate of the struggle against privatization of Sheonath River in Chhattisgarh in 1998. A large part of Sheonath River flows through Dantewada district, where the river is under the occupation of Essar Steel, Chhattisgarh Ltd.

Strictures were passed by the public accounts committee (PAC) in its report submitted to the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly on March 2007 on Sheonath River's privatization. The privatization was justified in the name of meeting the requirement of industries, which, however, also meant denial of water for irrigation needs of farmers during summer months. The PAC characterized this as 'criminal offences, previous citation of which can only be found in [the] criminal world'. But no action was taken on their recommendation. The PAC was set up in 2003 as a result of a long-drawn-out struggle launched by people outraged at the selling of Sheonath River in 1998 without paying any heed to their needs or concerns. Despite this agitation Radius Water Ltd, a company set up by Kailash Engineering, which won the contract to execute the project, became the 'owner' for twenty-two years of 48 mld (million litres daily) water. Radius company then began fencing land along the river. By the year 2000 they fenced 22.7 kilometres of river, took over thousands of square feet of land, as well as 176 acres along the river bank. Significantly, Radius acquired assets valued at Rs 5 crore by paying a princely sum of one rupee to Madhya Pradesh Aydhyogik Kendra Nigam. In the very first year of operation they collected Rs 1.84 crore from Chhattisgarh State Industrial Development Corporation (CSIDC). This crime went on to become the norm in Chhattisgarh. One after the other the rivers Kelo, Kurkut, Shabri, Kharm and Mand

have been, or are in the process of being, handed over to private companies.[27]

Incidentally, the MoRD's report (2009) says, referring to Orissa, that

> [t]he water requirement, as given on the POSCO website, is 286 million litres per day, [which] will be procured from Jobra barrage on the Mahanadi River in Cuttack district in Orissa. The water for this is forced to come from the upstream Hirakud dam. There is already an agitation by the local farmers against reservation of water from the Hirakud dam for industrial purposes.

Going by the decision of the High Level Clearance Authority constituted by the Orissa government on 4 May 2011, whereby Jindal Symtex Ltd, at Durgapur in Angul district, a joint venture of Tatas and Sasol called Strategic Energy Technology Systems at Gudiakatein in Dhenkanal as well as an aluminium unit promoted by L&T and Dubal in Rayagada have been allowed to draw 90, 90 and 60 cusecs of water respectively. The first two will be from the Mahanadi river and the third project from the Nagavali river. The total volume of water available for agriculture in Orissa will get reduced. Availability of water is already an issue with, for instance, Khandadhar (Edge of the Sword) waterfall, where POSCO has been given mining concessions. Water is already being diverted by existing mining units in the area for their mining and staff use. The local population, which includes a primitive tribe, Paudi Bhuyan, complains that the volume of water has reduced drastically already. With POSCO starting its mining activity it will come down further and therefore availability of water in the Brahmani River (which then merges with the Mahanadi) will get affected.[28]

Finally, the loot and plunder has another side. The bamboo trade is valued at Rs 10,000 crore, being sold to the paper and pulp industry. The forest department has been campaigning hard to forestall forest dwellers getting the right over forest produce under the FRA 2006. Recently, when on an experimental basis, villagers in Mendha-Lekha of Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra got the transit passes to transport bamboo, the Maharashtra principal conservator

of forests made a public statement that despite the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 bamboo and other forest produce trade will continue to be regulated by the forest department. They will auction the bamboo harvest and if any forest produce is cut without their permission, those people will be prosecuted.[29] More recently, a biennial report by the Forest Survey of India by the Dehradun-based wing of the ministry of environment and forests claimed that a net loss of 367 square kilometres of forest occurred between 2009 and 2011. The Secretary, environment, was quick to claim that it was Naxalites/Maoists chopping down trees. Yet, neither in Chhattisgarh nor in Jharkhand where the Maoists are strong has there been a loss of forested areas per the same report. In fact whereas in the former there was no loss, in the latter there was a net gain of 83 square kilometres .[30]

So why is it that despite laws, rules and protective legislation people continue to be displaced from their land? Why do the concerns expressed by the farmers get ignored where river water is concerned? Why has there been gross violation of statutory provisions of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA, 1996), especially of Section 4 (i) which provides for consultations with the gram sabhas for land acquisitions and also empowers them under Section 4 (m) to prevent alienation of land in scheduled areas as well as to restore ‘any unlawfully alienated land of a scheduled tribe’.

The MoRD report laments that ‘provisions of PESA (enacted in 1996) have not been implemented in any of the nine states (in the fifth schedule areas). It is true that all the nine states have made amendments in their Panchayat Raj Acts. On the flip side none of these states have made Rules for the implementation of PESA’. It says next that ‘in some States there are as many as 29 Acts to be brought in conformity with PESA’. Not too long ago, on 9 November 2009, the prime minister in his address at the Chief Ministers’ Conference on Implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006 drew their attention to ‘the importance of implementing in letter and spirit the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas known as PESA’. But it

was never explained why PESA remained unimplemented for all these sixteen years.

The forest bureaucracy, which has opposed gram sabhas being provided the authority to sanction diversion of forests for ‘non-forest activities’, has come to exercise authority through the Forest Action Committee (FAC). Instead of clearing applications in accordance with the FRA, the committee has given clearance for projects on the mere assurance of the state government. This includes giving away forest land, such as they did in Singareni Collieries in the Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. Thus 108.78 hectares were given to the Collieries out of the 2548.54 acres cleared for corporate activities in AP.[31]

In area after area gram sabhas (village council) have seen their statutory powers cast aside by the corporations and an obliging government machinery coercing adivasis into signing away their land in exchange for either ‘trinkets’ or threat of eviction without ‘compensation’ or a post-dated promissory notes. The fate of other protective legislations, which regulate procedure for land or forest acquisition, have been no different. Take the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) of 1980. Its Section 2 says that ‘no state government or authority shall make, except with prior approval of the central government any order directing . . . use of land for non-forest purposes’. Yet, through a sleight of hand something called ‘in principle approval’ was invented and used to commence construction. ‘Prior approval’ became a mere formality. This has happened in the case of the Niyamgiri Hills where the Orissa Mining Corporation through Vedanta made a proposal for mining bauxite. Mining work was being carried out there under ‘in principle’ approval and in clear violation of the FCA (1980) as well as Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006.[32] This route, of bypassing ‘prior approval’, was defended by the authorities before the judiciary by claiming that ‘prior approval’ was nothing more than ‘due approval’![33]

Similarly, the Environment Impact Assessment notification 2006 requires projects’ proponents to have ‘prior environmental

clearance'. The MRD report says that within two years of the notification the ministry of environment and forests cleared 1736 projects. Worse still, in Orissa in the last five years the MoEF 'retrospectively approved the illegal clearing of 1224 hectares of forest by mining companies, even in ecologically fragile areas'. Most shockingly, Videh Upadhayay writes, the PM laid the foundation stone for Dibang hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh without the requisite approval and clearance.[34]

Verily, laws are meant to be violated most of all by the corporate and State authorities themselves. It is this egregious loot of mineral and other common resources which passes for 'development' and acts as the incentive for inviting foreign direct investment to invest in and plunder Indian public resources.

Looting Begets Resistance

The simmering anger of people affected by government policies has thrown up various forms of resistance. A variety of groups and parties are leading these struggles. It is here the Maoists provide the most formidable resistance that has forced the ruling classes to blink every now and then. The report of the Expert Group (EG) constituted by the Planning Commission to look into 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas' (July 2008) points out that 'unrest is often the only thing that actually puts pressure on the government to make things work and for the government to live up to its own promises' (1.18.4).

But what is this 'unrest' due to? The report attributes it to the 'developmental paradigm pursued since independence'. According to them, 'it is a matter of common observation that the inequalities between classes, between town and country, and between the upper castes and the underprivileged communities are increasing' (1.3). And therefore, they point out that 'an honest response to it (radical violence) must . . . begin by ameliorating the structural violence in the society' (1.5).

Besides, the lived experience of people is that writ petitions, affidavits and memorandums have not helped arrest, let alone reverse, loss of river, land and forest. Nor has there been criminal prosecution of those who illegally made a claim on adivasi land and/or manufactured gram sabha consent in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa for corporate-led industrialization. In short, it is well nigh impossible to separate the government's war against Maoists from land dispossession of tribals by the government as well as encouraging mining corporations and mineral-based industries as an intrinsic part of the economic policy which receives support from

virtually every section of the Parliament, barring honourable exceptions.

Meanwhile, for nearly three decades Maoists have lived, mobilized, radicalized and empowered the tribals to set up their own 'governance'. What began in the early 1980s as a campaign against forest, revenue and police departments and moneylenders started to address 'internal contradictions' in the adivasi society including land ownership. It took up issues of fixing prices for forest produce. The most important was that of raising the prices of *tendu patta* from two rupees for 100 bundles (of 100 leaves each) in the early 1980s to eighty rupees for the same by the mid-1990s. Today a bundle of fifty leaves of tendu fetches a rupee. The Janatam Sarkar runs schools, a health system, rural credit and seed banks, small irrigation projects, etc. They have also introduced social reforms and pushed gender-sensitive reforms within the adivasi society, including inside families. Evidence of changes brought about by them is scanty. In the interview to the BBC given by Kobad Gandhy, member of the CPI (Maoist) politburo before he was arrested, he said one of the first things the Maoists did in Dandakaranya was to teach people to drink boiled water, which brought down infant mortality by 50 per cent. With this they won the affection of the tribals and then began the long arduous struggle to improve their lives. In a sense the work carried out by them is truly phenomenal if not innovative—such as mobile schools and mobile health clinics, experiments with cultivation of various crops, vegetables and small irrigation projects —and establishes a modicum of parallel administration.

The political opponents of Maoists—such as Manish Kunjam, local leader of the CPI and the head of the Adivasi Mahasabha whose party equivocates over the war efforts of the Indian State against the Maoists—protest the crackdown on their cadres falsely accused of being Maoists. But even he told the *Statesman*[35] that 'Maoists are expanding day by day in Bastar since they first appeared in the region in early 1980s. They have total monopoly now in region's interior'. Then he added that 'the day they decide to stop mining in Bastar they will do it easily *as they enjoy massive support among*

tribal population [emphasis mine]'. The general secretary (GS) of the Communist Party of India told the press on 17 October 2011, referring to the large rally held in November 2007 at Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh:

> I was amazed to see such huge participation of people in the rally. Neither my party nor I had any influence in Bastar. Hence it was not possible for us to mobilize such large number of people. The rally was a success because it had the backing of Naxals.

Against this background, the district collector of Dantewada was categoric: 'To end the problem of Naxalites it is not enough to kill Naxalites but . . . to crush and destroy their system operating at the village level.'[36] Thus in the war in Bastar (Chhattisgarh) one side is bent upon destroying the Janatam Sarkar to weaken resistance to the government's enrich-the-rich policy. At the same time, the Maoists are determined to defend the gains and the development the Janatam Sarkar has brought about, meant to improve the lot of those marginalized by the rulers. The source of the Maoists' formidable resistance lies in their rootedness among the people.

What tends to strengthen this argument—that the war has been foisted upon the people—is borne out in another development. Many concerned Indians were encouraged by the news reports that the Union home minister had written to Swami Agnivesh on 11 May 2010 requesting him to explore the possibility of a seventy-two hour ceasefire to pave the way for talks between the Maoists and the Indian State. The letter sent by a senior leader of the CPI (Maoist) and the spokesperson of the central committee of the party, Cherukuri Rajkumar, aka Azad, on 31 May 2010 reiterated that his party was serious about talks. In particular, unlike in the past, the party's response was unambiguously positive. Azad wrote that

> to ensure the establishment of peace there should be ceasefire or cessation of hostilities by both sides simultaneously instead of asking one side to abjure violence . . . lift the ban on the party and mass organizations so as to facilitate them to take up open forms of struggle . . . initiate measures to release Party leaders as a prelude to the release of political prisoners . . . and . . . stop all its efforts to

> escalate the war including the measures of calling back all the para military forces deployed in the war zones.

In the interview to Siddharth Varadarajan, Azad had responded to the pointed question about whether by engaging in talks the Maoists wanted ‘to buy time’ or if it was a ‘re-evaluation of political strategy’.[37] He had been candid. He said ‘it does not need much . . . common sense to understand that both sides will utilize a situation of ceasefire to strengthen their respective sides’. He pointed out that ‘talks will give some respite to the people who are oppressed and suppressed under the fascist jackboots of the Indian state and state-sponsored terrorist organizations . . .’ In the same interview he also reiterated that it was the ‘imposition of the ban that had led the Party and the mass organizations to take up arms in the first place . . . What shook the rulers at that time (in 1978) and compelled them to declare Jagtyala and Sircila taluks in Karimnagar district of north Telangana as disturbed areas in 1978 was not the armed struggle of the Maoists (which had suffered a complete setback . . . by 1972) but the powerful [movement against] anti-feudal order in the countryside . . .’

When Azad was executed by the Andhra Pradesh Special Intelligence Bureau (APSIB), the MHA washed its hands of the entire effort launched by them and refused even to persuade its own party (the Congress government in AP) to institute a judicial inquiry into Azad’s killing. The 2004–05 peace talks between the Maoists and the Andhra Pradesh government too ended because fake encounters continued to be carried out by the AP police and Maoist retaliation ensued. Thus even before substantive issues could be taken up talks got sabotaged and violence and counter-violence began which finally dealt a severe setback to Maoists in AP. The Indian government’s attitude in particular, therefore, tends to suggest that they are hell-bent on prosecuting this war.

Consequently, the reason for ‘operation green hunt’ is also because Maoists offer formidable resistance against the implementation of hundreds of MoUs for mining- and mineral-based industries in predominantly tribal India where they enjoy

considerable support. Without weakening this resistance, the Government of India fears radicalization of local resistance. In the face of this opposition spearheaded by a variety of groups and parties, with people veering towards the Maoists, the Government of India's mineral as well as the foreign direct investment policy will remain unrealized. It is worth remembering that there is consensus between the Congress and the BJP to curtail political activities by 'LWE' and to create an atmosphere, in the words of the prime minister, 'conducive to investment' and 'rapid economic development'. This has laid the ground for a long-drawn-out bloodletting, the likes of which has not been seen since 1947. This will be a 'fight to the finish' in which one side is bent on destroying the 'LWE' and the other side is determined to defend themselves. It threatens to be a prolonged attritional warfare. Having invested so much in this policy and in prosecuting this war, it is not surprising the government shows no signs of reversing or radically modifying current policies.[38]

Behind every civil war in India is a history of struggle— overground and non-violent. In sixty-three years fifteen Parliaments have been voted in and, it is apparent to any discerning person, voters continue to remain impoverished, disempowered and barely able to survive. In this sense to eulogize the present order of things or to romanticize it by glossing over its infirmities, when failures of the present order stare at us, could mean that bluff and bluster are sought to be employed to obfuscate the real issues. It is also noted that formal democracies use the 'national security' genre of laws to impose their diktat on people because it criminalizes legitimate activities even as it, simultaneously, legitimizes unlawful acts of the authorities. This means that once the authorities proscribe an organization and place curbs on their activities including propaganda, organizing etc., then anyone offering any help to any member of the proscribed organization ends up committing a crime. It doesn't matter if that help is extended with respect to medical aid, legal assistance or to procure employment for a member of such an organization. Attending a meeting called by that organization and addressing such

meetings could also invite prosecution. Were this ban to be lifted the very same evidence ceases to incriminate. Thus the most innocuous facts can get invested with criminal intent as soon as ‘national security’ considerations come into play. The other fact to note is that there is a strong likelihood of evidence being manufactured, facts misconstrued or twisted to suit the State’s objective of silencing critics of its policy of curbing the so-called internal sources of threat to security.[39]

It is a repressive climate of internal war in which our own people are present on both sides but where the State, by illegistimate means, wants to deny the other side any recognition as fellow citizens. They in fact criminalize all legitimate activities while themselves remaining egregious in violating international and national laws. This makes it incumbent upon us, ordinary citizens, that we do not succumb to official diktat to tailor our convictions. It requires us to go beyond official propaganda to understand who the Maoists are and why they are attracting the most oppressed sections to their fold. Surely, they must be doing something right if the people continue to ‘trust them’?[40]

A Brief Comment on the Communist Movement

India's freedom movement has been made up of various ideological streams. Notwithstanding the academic mythology of how Indian people are innately peaceful and abhor violence, history and the records of peasant uprisings belie these claims. Even before the emergence of the Indian National Congress, nationalist revolutionaries had been struggling against the alien British rule. It is also well known that the peasantry and adivasis in India had rebelled and defied the colonial rulers time and again by waging heroic and inspiring battles. These bloody battles energized the Indian people through the period of their enslavement. While not all of these were countrywide, struggles like the first war of independence of 1857, the Santhal rebellion, the Sapha Har or Kherwar movement in the 1870s, the outbreaks of the 1868 Naikda forest tribe in Gujarat and, in 1882, those of the Kacha Nagas of Cachar, etc., were remarkable uprisings of the people. In Vishakhapatnam in the tribal agency area of Andhra Pradesh people revolted again and again in 1840, 1845, 1858, 1861 and 1862. But by far the most prominent revolt was the Birsa Munda-led uprising in Chhota Nagpur in 1899–1900. The Kolis revolted in 1883. The Oraons and the Mundas revolted in Chhota Nagpur in 1914. In 1917 the tribals of Manipur and the Santhals of Mayurbhanj rose in revolt while the Bhils rose in Rajasthan against the Bhil Raja in 1913.

The rebellion of indigo cultivators during 1859–60, by the Moplas of Malabar against Hindu upper caste landlords, the struggle of bankrupt and debt-ridden cotton growers in Maharashtra in 1875, the jute growers' uprising against moneylenders in East Bengal, the revolt of low caste Ramoshis of Maharashtra under the leadership of Phadke, and several 'no-revenue' movements after the famine of

1899–1900 in parts of Maharashtra and similar movements in the Kamrup and Darrang areas of Assam in 1893–94 were one way or another aimed against colonialism and feudalism.

The emergence of English-educated Indians also contributed to the spread of bourgeois liberal and nationalist ideals. While the formation of the INC in 1883 is considered momentous, it is necessary to recall that frustration and discontent with the Congress's approach of 'striking but not wounding' the British Raj drove middle class youth towards charting a more revolutionary path. The emergence of Anushilan Samiti in 1902 with its weekly *Yugantar* in 1906, and the formation of the Gadar Party in 1913 as the most influential among a motley group of national revolutionaries, with a progressive and secular ideology, are prime examples. The Gadar Party was the first movement to grasp the long and protracted nature of the Indian independence movement and the necessity of waging war against the colonialists by building an army. It is within this tradition that the establishment of the Communist Party of India (CPI) is located.

The initial attempts to form the CPI were made outside India. The Gadar Party under Lala Hardayal from America, the Berlin Committee under Virendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, the Provisional Government of Independent India from Kabul under the leadership of Raja Mahendra Pratap and a group led by Ras Behari Bose in Japan worked together and turned towards Russia for help. It was the emigrant revolutionaries who formed the CPI in Tashkent on 17 October 1920. However, simultaneously in India communist groups emerged independent of each other in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, etc. The first All India Communist Conference was held in 1925 in Kanpur and led to the formation of the CPI. But the first congress of the CPI was held only in May 1943.

Different trends were visible in the CPI from its earliest days and much of it had to do with the attitude of communists towards the INC and the course to be adopted for liberating Indian people from the curse of imperialism and feudal oppression.

It came to the fore in the 1940s when the CPI took the stand of cooperation with the British when at the local level the Kisan Sabha

and the Congress Socialist Party leaders were at the forefront of the Quit India movement. It was the Forward Bloc and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) members who provided leadership at a time when Congress leaders were in jail having failed to provide a concrete programme for the people to follow. Nevertheless, it was due to the local participation of socialists that in north and central Bihar around 80 per cent of the police stations were either taken over or evacuated. In eastern UP and Bihar rebels formed local governments on the border with Nepal. The CPI lapsed into sectarianism when the First Congress accused Forward Bloc and the CSP of being 'fifth columnists'. However, with the end of the war and the decisive role played by the Soviet Red Army in defeating the Nazis there was revival of interest in the communist party. They emerged as the main supporters of the industrial strikes which broke out throughout the country and joined the popular movement against the trial of 20,000 Indian National Army personnel as well as lent support to the mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy in 1946. It was the INC and the Muslim League which opposed these popular movements. When the Tebhaga peasant struggle began it was the Muslim League ministry which unleashed brutal repression on the movement. Just as the INC was to do in Telangana once the autocratic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad came to an end and the Indian Army launched a military operation (called 'police action'). Thus the same army which annexed Hyderabad thereafter moved against the communist revolutionaries who had at the peak of their uprising liberated 3000 villages and had set up a parallel administration of their own.

What is important is that even when the Telangana struggle was going on, differences emerged within the CPI over the issue of partisan war and the attitude towards the INC after the 'Transfer of Power'. These differences remained a polarizing factor within the movement. Because how one perceives the nature of the Indian State—the make-up of the ruling class, and the capacity of the very same State to be taken over by the communists and made to serve the interests of India's working class, when everything else remains the same—was an issue that continues to polarize the Indian Left.

So much so that today in the twenty-first century the issue of the nature of the Indian State remains the principal ideological divide even within the various groups which trace their lineage to the Naxalbari uprising of 1966, with many groups opting to work openly and to participate in elections even when their party charter still speaks of revolutionary transformation.

One of the major points of fissure in the early phase of the Naxalite movement was over the two sets of idea which have now crystallized into two distinct programmes: open functioning and mass work best exemplified by the CPI (ML) (Liberation), and an area-wise seizure of power through guerrilla/mobile guerrilla warfare or protracted People's War of the CPI (Maoist). This was also one of the source origins of the difference between the two lines in the undivided CPI through 1946–52 during the Telangana struggle as well as the reason for a break from the CPI (Marxist) in 1965–66 and the formation of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (1967) and subsequently the CPI (ML) (1969). To put it another way the CPI(Maoist) perceive themselves as the inheritors of a revolutionary tradition nurtured by peasant and adivasi struggles of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries, the role played by nationalist revolutionaries which was both anti-feudal and anti-colonial to begin with and went on to become anti-feudal and anti-imperialist. For them the task of emancipating the people of India remains unchanged, despite the fact that a lot of changes have occurred in the past six decades. It would be difficult for anyone to deny that while the worst features of the British Raj are behind us, what has replaced the Raj has not managed to lift people out of the degrading and humiliating conditions of their existence. A life of dignity continues to elude the vast majority of our people. If not for any other reason, then this alone should encourage us to consider what Maoists have to say, shorn of the rhetoric of their supporters and detractors.

Inside the Guerrilla Zone

Dandakaranya (DK) is the name given to a vast area of central India encompassing thirteen districts of the five states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. The districts comprise Adilabad, Khammam, East Godavari, Vishakhapatnam (AP); Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker, Narayanpur, Bastar and Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh); Gadchiroli, Chandrapur and Bhandara (Maharashtra); Balaghat (MP); and Koraput and Malkangiri (Orissa). It covers an area of nearly 1,10,000 square kilometres which comprises thick forests, hills, rivers and rivulets. It has an approximate population of twenty-two million. It is an abode of several tribal peoples such as Gond, Madia, Govari, Kondh, Konda Reddy, Nayakapu, Dorla, Muria (Koya) and Oriya tribes of Puruja, Gudijursa, Butar, Durva, etc.

Although DK has rich cultivable land, with moderate rainfall and three major rivers (Godavari, Indravati and Pranahita), apart from a number of medium-sized rivers which criss-cross the region, drinking water and irrigation are scarce. It has extensive mineral deposits of iron ore, bauxite, dolomite, granite, marble, limestone, corundum, mica, manganese, etc.

It is one of the richest forest belts in the country and the Jagdalpur and Kanker markets in Bastar are said to be Asia's prominent trading centres for minor forest produce such as tendu leaf, tamarind, mahua flower and seeds, sal seeds, gum and medicinal herbs.

The vast wealth of DK has been looted by the rajas, British colonialists and by the public and private corporate entities after 1947. Tribal people were kept in a state of extreme backwardness by the post-1947 dispensation which maintained a socio-economic system with a very low level of productivity. No more than 2 per cent

of the area was irrigated. 40 per cent of family incomes came from forest produce. Agricultural methods were backward and barely five quintals of paddy per acre was produced. Natural fertilizer such as cow dung was little used; rice was not transplanted and no weeding was done. Sowing was determined not by the arrival of the monsoon but the dictates of the village priest or witch-doctor, who only after animal sacrifice allowed sowing. The bulk of the good cultivable land was cornered by tribal landlords, non-tribal migrants in cahoots with government officials/politicians or by the local gentry for non-payment of usurious debt. Besides, tribal elders through the mechanism of 'dispute settlement' extorted huge amounts. Successive Forest Acts deprived the tribals of their access to the forest and its minor produce. They were then accused of breaking the law by forest officials for the 'offence' of using forest land or felling of firewood. Recall that 40 per cent of tribal income was from minor forest produce, access to which was controlled by the forest department.

Literacy rates were 17 per cent in 2001 and have risen in the last few years to reach 30 per cent, although much work needs to be done to find out the quality of literacy achieved. Malnutrition among tribal children is above 50 per cent and nearly half of the tribal women are anaemic. Thus there was ruthless exploitation by landlords, traders, moneylenders and government officials and in modern times by public and private sector corporates tapping the resources, displacing hundreds of thousands, polluting rivers, cutting the forests and virtually treating tribals as bonded labour.

Tribals have risen in revolt again and again. For instance, the Paralkot revolt of 1825 was against the joint Maratha–British rule which had deprived the local zamindars of their rights and was led by the zamindar of Paralkot, Gond Singh. Then there was the Meiriya revolt, which spread during 1852–62 when the British tried to forcibly stop the tribal practice of human sacrifice and undertook cruel attacks on tribal villages to impose their diktat, and was yet again directed against the Maratha–British rule. It was led by the priest of Danteshwari temple. When the British deprived tribals of the right to forests through a series of Forest Acts during 1910–14, three armed

revolts took place against the British. Again in 1966 when the Central government removed the local raja, Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo, and he and many of his followers were killed in the palace at Jagdalpur, tribals rose in revolt. And in 1970s tribals protested and agitated successfully against a World Bank-sponsored pine plantation project. Bailadila iron mine workers of tribal origin protested their inhuman working and living conditions including the sexual exploitation of tribal women by non-tribal traders and other migrants.

It is here that three squads, each comprising fiveor six members of the CPI (ML) PW, entered DK from Andhra Pradesh in late 1979–80. They began with a survey of the area and a study of the topography, the class contradictions and the socio-economic conditions of the people. In the process they began establishing contacts with the masses and eventually created and established their parallel administration. The DK guerrilla zone is spread, according to the CPI (Maoist), over parts of ten districts namely Bastar, Bijapur, Dantewada, Kanker, Narayanpur and Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh), Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), Balaghat (MP) and Malkangiri (Orissa), with a population of approximately seven million.

The Journey

> Lying to the south of what was then the Central Provinces was the state of Bastar, a territory the size of Belgium. The great plain of Chhattisgarh stretches down past Raipur and Dharamtari in hot and dusty monotony till it spends itself against the hills of Kanker. Thenceforward the journey is a never failing delight; as the traveller moves towards the Bastar plateau the countryside breaks into a song about him; he is greeted by hardy smiling woodmen singing at their work; the skyline is broken by fantastic piles of rock; all around is the evergreen sal forest. Presently he sees looming before him a row of sharply rising hills, the sentinels that stand on guard before the country of Murias, and the long steep descent of the Keskal Ghat has to be essayed. From the summit there is magnificent view of the great sea of hills and forest below.
>
> —Verrier Elwin[41]

Were Verrier Elwin to travel along the highway today he would be greeted with the same stunning view from the height of Keshkal Ghat. Except moving closer to the valley below he would be confronted by the ugliness of military build-up and presence: motorcycle-borne soldiers with assault rifles alongside the road-fenced boundary of tribal land occupied by the Kanker counter-insurgency warfare school. He would also be surprised to find heavy military vehicles plying on the highway. Were he to veer off the highway he would probably wonder at how ‘development’ is being brought to the tribal population with the barrel of the gun by the government, with a proliferation of security camps across Bastar. Instead of songs, the roar of motorcycles or military vehicles would be heard by him.

From Kanker town onwards the heavy presence of security forces becomes palpably clear. The journey from New Delhi to Jagdalpur,

via Raipur, was uneventful, although we missed the first of the two dates provided for meeting our guide. 15 January 2010 arrived much too slow and the wait for the appointed hour took even longer. We departed from Jagdalpur after a light breakfast because food was the thing farthest from our mind. While the wait was long, bananas, tea and bhajias kept us company. Finally the appointed hour drew close and we made our way to the spot. Within fifteen minutes our journey had begun. We drove as far as the vehicle could take us and we had walked barely 100 metres when we were greeted by the PLGA platoon sent to guide us through the forest. The young woman who led the team and the guerrillas accompanying her lined up and we were greeted formally with Lal Salaam. They had come prepared to carry Jan Myrdal across the stream we had to cross to start our trek up into the hills. He declined. After crossing the stream we halted for a round of tea and biscuits, our last halt before the next seven hours of a gruelling trek up and down the hills. It got dark and we had to make do with torches and followed the nimble-footed PLGA members who obviously knew every step they took. With darkness surrounding us it began to turn cold. Winter in the forest areas of Bastar turns very cold, and the day temperature actually lulls one into not realizing how cold it can get.

We were told we had to make it to the first halt a good few hours away where comrades had been waiting since the day before to receive us. As the going got tough Jan Myrdal, eighty-three-plus years, tall and heavy and with a heart condition, was persuaded to allow the PLGA comrades to carry him in a *palki* they had made out of bamboo trunks. Hungry, tired and sweaty, despite the cold, it was surprising that I found myself pressing ahead. For long I had dreamt of doing just this, to travel to DK and meet the comrades whose tales I had heard and I was excited I was going to meet them. It was a childlike tingling in the pit of my stomach. Barely two hours away from our first night halt another platoon joined us to help carry Jan Myrdal. As we neared the spot and drew closer we could hear songs. Comrades who had been waiting for us knew we were approaching and they were singing to welcome us. There they were

—each one shook hands with us and raised his or her fist and we did the same. We had finally reached.

We were told that food was waiting for us and that we should wash, eat and sleep and that we would meet in the morning. The night was cold and it was the first night I had trouble sleeping. To sleep in the forest under the night sky filled with stars . . . shivering with cold and maybe a sense of excitement, I passed the first night.

First and Lasting Impression

The first day or two people were shy to speak because they could not place me. Was I Indian? Then how could I converse with Jan Myrdal in his language? Maybe I was a non-resident Indian? Also they were not too fluent in Hindi, were not sure whether I understood Chhattisgarhi, which they were more familiar with, and knew that I did not know Gondi or Koyam. But after the first day curiosity got the better of them and they began to converse, rather ask me questions. When they found that I could speak and write Hindi and that I was an Indian who had lived abroad but now lived in Delhi they could begin to place me. It became distinctly easier when we began to sing together. They asked me questions about how people lived in Delhi. Did people have work? How much did they earn? How did they live? Why did revolution not succeed in Europe when Marx and Engels lived and worked there? Is there no class struggle there? Why do Taliban and other Jehadis bomb mosques and target their own people, not the US military? How come Kashmiris do not have a single party fighting for their liberation? Each question needed answers, which could not be perfunctory. But I was enthused by their inquisitiveness.

First impressions are considered important because they leave a lasting impact on us. How do they carry out their work? Who does what? What do they do in their leisure time? What was the body language of cadres when seniors were around? All this was important to observe.

The first thing that strikes someone entering a ‘guerrilla zone’ in Bastar, where the Maoists run their own government, the Janatam Sarkar, is the form of greeting. Everyone, old and young, men and women, villager or party member, shakes hands, raises their fist and

greets you with Lal Salaam. The second thing to catch your attention is the number of women in the JS as well as in every platoon or company of the PLGA or People's Militia. Many a platoon had woman commanders. The platoon that came to escort us was led by a woman. They are not only in command but carry out the riskiest tasks, just as men share equally all the responsibilities with the women: collecting wood, water, lighting fires, cooking. It was quite remarkable to see how in the platoons women and men behaved with each other. Each of them carried a load of up to 20–25 kg made up of their weapon, ration and kit. Both were adept at stitching and sewing. In fact they were rather good not just at repairing but stitching their own kits in which they carry their clothes, books, toiletries and ammunition magazines. When the strap of my backpack broke, it was fixed by one of the young men in the platoon. It was a neat job. The kit bag they carried on their shoulders was stitched by them too, in which they carried two pairs of clothes, toilet things, ammunition, etc. The uniform was tailored inside the 'guerrilla zone', shoes and toiletries bought from the market outside. The third thing that strikes you is cleanliness. Water is boiled. For latrines they dig a hole, some distance away from the campsite, and my companion Jan Myrdal was most impressed because he said it reminded him of the Swedish military design for field toilets.

It was most striking to see that no sooner are chores done, be it night or day, than almost all the PLGA members take out their books and read or take out their notebook and write. All JS divisions bring out their own magazines in Gondi/Koyam—south Bastar division: *Pituri* (Rebellion); west Bastar division: *Midangur* (Fireplace); Darbha division: *Moyil Gudrum* (Thunder); north and south divisions of Gadchiroli: *Poddhu* (Sun); Maad and north Bastar joint division: *Bhoomkal* (Earthquake); east Bastar division: *Bhoomkal Sandesh* (Message of Rebellion). The JS brings out a magazine called *Janatana Raj* (People's State). The party brings out its own called *Viyukka*, its military command *Padiyora Pollo*, Chetna Natya Manch *Jhankar*, etc. Groups practising singing was also a common sight. All in all, twenty-five magazines are printed regularly in DK. All of them are printed and distributed inside the region. I saw screen printing of

leaflets for the three-day bandh from 25–27 January 2010, i.e., a week before the programme. Education is high on the list of priorities and everyone is encouraged to read and write, to ask questions or seek someone's help to explain. Four textbooks have been prepared by the JS for students up to the fifth standard (maths, social science, politics and Hindi) and four are under preparation (history of DK, culture, biology and general science).

I was told by a senior cadre that by and large people don't have a problem reading and making sense of reports. But they do get stuck in understanding analysis or in making sense of it. So how is this problem addressed? Group discussions are the way in which this problem is tackled. An article is read out and everyone is encouraged to explain what they understand of it. A discussion takes place and a party member explains the meaning, and concept/s get understood. I was told that group discussions also help encourage people to ask questions or seek clarification and overcome diffidence for whatever they find difficult to follow.

Everyone takes turns doing the chores, from sentry duty to cooking. We were guests from outside and we had more leeway. But the first thing they do is boil water. Once they are done with their morning ritual it's time for PT. By 8 a.m. they finish their breakfast. Breakfast can vary between *poha*, khichri, etc., mixed with peanuts and followed by tea. Lunch and dinner is rice with dal and sabzi. Food is simple but nutritious. Once a week they get meat. Sometimes more than once if fish is available or if there is pork, provided by the Revolutionary People's Committee. (An RPC is an elected body which governs three to five villages. Fourteen or fifteen such RPCs make up an Area RPC. And three to five ARPCs go on to constitute a division.) Sometimes, as when I travelled to Abujmaad, khichri with peanuts was all we got. But it was simple, tasty and nutritious. Of course with every meal we were offered green chillies, considered a rich source of vitamin C. Milk is scarce so milk powder is used for tea. Fruits such as bananas and papayas are plentiful in the JS areas. There is no fixed time for sleeping but invariably by 10 p.m. everyone would retire for the night. Camps are never in the same spot; they keep shifting. A plastic sheet is spread

and people cover themselves with blankets and sleep. For us, their guests, a shawl was spread on the plastic sheet and above our heads another plastic sheet was spread to protect us against heavy morning dew. Jan and I were served tea in bed when we woke up. A special privilege. While the forest was used for daily rituals, over years they have honed their skills and shitholes are dug and then covered before shifting camps.

People watch select movies. Two films were shown (on popular demand: *Rang De Basanti* and *Mangal Pandey*. Why these two films? These are patriotic movies and their plots revolve around the heroes of Indian people such as Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev . . . How often do they get to see movies? Only when some relatively senior party man visits them who also has a laptop. Laptop? How do they charge laptops? Well, every company, if not every platoon, has solar panels used to power lights, computers, etc. TV programmes and debates were downloaded from YouTube, copied and circulated and mostly available with companies. I was surprised to know that many a debate in which I had featured had already been watched. Some thought that I looked healthier on screen! But of course their all-time favourite was Arundhati Roy. She spoke English so how did they all follow her? Some of the senior comrades translated what she had to say for the benefit of others. Many questions were posed about her. Yes, she has quite a fan following inside the jungle too.

Radio was listened to and PLGA personnel like to listen avidly to a radio programme which carries special Hindi film songs played as requested by the *fauji*s (soldiers). But the most favoured is BBC news in Hindi which is heard by everyone, every morning and evening. Local radio news is followed for negative reportage with a view that news which denounces them is news about them. In a platoon nearly every third person had a radio. Newspapers and magazines reach them after several days. Books are mostly hard copies downloaded from the Net. Yes, there are places where the Net can be accessed. The rest is human ingenuity. In the night solar-powered lights come in handy for people to gather around and read. Or sit around the fire and chat.

What about alchohol and smoking? After all, tribal people in Bastar brew their own drinks. *Sulfi* and mahua, etc., are quite common. It was interesting that while the party does not allow opening of IMFL shops in the JS areas, they do not stop brewing of traditional drinks. But seldom does a party member drink. It is expected of party members that they neither drink nor smoke. Although they do not prohibit smoking, unlike drinking alcohol, and tendu leaves are available in plenty, they actively discourage smoking. And the JS conducts propaganda campaigns. Two people were to publicly announce that they are quitting smoking and encourage others to follow suit. It was interesting that not one person in the camp or the platoon which accompanied me, smoked or drank.

Finally, it was the relaxed body language of the cadres when seniors or *dada lor* were around which I found quite remarkable. I would not like to say this is how it is with everyone because I spent only a fortnight with them and have, therefore, limited experience to fall back on. But in my presence, when leaders or senior cadres were around, ordinary members were not obsequious or diffident. Cadres were smiling, sometimes cracking jokes or asking questions. They sat close to the seniors or stood close chatting. Since most of the conversation was in Gondi I could not follow the flow but it did not appear very hierarchical or status-conscious or meek. Yes, when seniors were engaged in conversation or talking to us they were not disturbed. There was a pecking order and when the GS was sitting with us we were left to ourselves and when he spoke, others who sat with us waited till he had finished. My most memorable experience was to see how cadres gathered around Murali who was cracking jokes and listening to young men and women. When I was lying next to him talking every now and then someone would come and he had infinite patience to answer their queries. One of my PLGA companions told me everyone is fond of him because he loves to crack jokes and chat with everyone. The GS was respected but he spent time reading, writing or conversing with senior cadres. He appeared to be serious and studious and spoke in measured tones. But what was very nice was the absence of adulation or a charismatic aura around the persona of the GS. This is something

which various offshoots of the Naxalbari movement suffered from for years. Here there was a cultivated impression of collective leadership with the GS being only first among equals.

I guess the general relaxed attitude had much to do with the more or less common lifestyle of leader and cadre. There was hardly much difference between what they ate or where they slept. Although in terms of work this difference was palpable. While I was washing clothes and doing a bad job of it, I saw, a little distance away, the GS do the same. I asked one of the cadres who helped fetch warm water for me, 'Does the GS wash his own clothes?' 'Yes,' he answered. Then he looked at what I was doing and remarked, 'You are not used to washing your clothes, are you? Let me do it for you.' I felt embarrassed that someone else had to help me wash my clothes while the GS, oblivious to it all, was busy beating his clothes on a stone. The contrast between my life as an urban middle class civil liberties activist who was a visitor to their forest abode with that of the members of the party, who gave up their life to live like most Indians could not have, been brought home to me better. It was a reminder that even when we condemn them for their failings we should never belittle their contribution. People who are willing to offer their lives and live frugally, leading a tough life, have an endearing quality. We who cannot lead such lives can hardly afford to become self-righteous when they, despite the life they lead, do not flinch from critics and are willing to engage, listen and explain. Raju, with whom many hours were spent, suffered from severe pain in his legs. Yet he had to walk a lot every day and I watched that he slept late and was up and about early. What kept him going were painkillers, which were not easy to come by. But all the days we spent, and Jan told me even when I was away in Abujmaad, his dimpled smile remained and no matter what questions were put to him he answered them patiently. Where does he derive his motivation from, through the agony of separation from his jailed wife and children and painful knees, to carry on? I would not vouch for every cadre or say that everyone is a paragon of virtue. But this is what I encountered here in the jungle. Perhaps conditions of life and the demands placed on

them made them sensitive and curious about life outside. But I was charmed by the cadres and senior leaders.

Thirty years of the movement had made the adivasi cadres aware of the world outside their forests. They knew that people are fighting to free themselves of oppression in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Manipur and Assam, as are the Naga people. Despite being blocked their minds were not warped. I was again being reminded of what I had discovered as a student—people who struggle become sensitive. But more importantly I pondered again the difference between those who speak a universal language against oppression and for freedom and, therefore, could relate to struggles of other people—like Palestinians, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Latin Americans or South Africans— and those with narrower vision who could not care less about people's struggles elsewhere or struggles markedly different from theirs. The globalized Indian intelligentsia is, ironically, more parochial and less cosmopolitan than perhaps the Indian forest dwellers living under the Janatam Sarkar. Those who live in jungles could empathize with people's struggles elsewhere in contrast to the urban-based intelligentsia who, despite having access to information, either knows not or could not care less.

What about Killings?

While travelling to and back from Abujmaad I spent days and nights with adivasi cadres who were PLGA members. This enabled me to subject them to a lot of questions about killings by the Maoist cadres. When confronted with the accusation that the party kills people and burns their houses, that people are killed at the slightest pretext for being 'informers', they protested in unison. 'We do not kill, loot or rape. We help people.' Is that not what even ruling classes claim? I asked. Chetu said, 'I come from south Dantewada where Salwa Judum did not spare girls and raped them. They pick on helpless civilians. Why don't they come and fight us instead of killing villagers?' Sukhlal said his younger brother is in jail, kept in a position known as *gola*: he is forced to remain, like Kartar Singh Sarabha in the Andaman jail, in a sitting position with chains on his ankles and wrists. His crime was that he was a member of Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS).

Does this mean they never kill? The reply was that they only kill the 'enemy of the people'. Who are these enemies of the people? Is anyone who opposes the party an enemy of the people? 'No, it is not important whether the party is considered one's enemy or the party is criticized. What matters is whether a person sides with the government forces and works with them. It is only then that the person is considered an enemy of the people. However, not every "enemy" is killed. The party, in fact, stops informers from being killed. It is only when they do not mend their ways and their conduct results in loss of lives that such person/s are killed,' said Sukhlal.

I remembered what the general secretary of the CPI (Maoist) had said in his interview to Jan Myrdal and me in January 2010:

> [I]n one of the extension areas, there was an incident where in collusion with the Inspector General of Police, 33 members belonging to two villages became agents of the enemy. In this context our comrades went and handled the issue. While villagers wanted to give capital punishment to the main agent of the police, party interceded to give a chance to that person to realize his mistake.

While I was inside the guerrilla zone I heard on the radio[42] that two people had been allegedly killed for joining the army according to the Union home minister P. Chidambaram speaking in Raipur. My companions were insistent that this had nothing to do with the party. They also told me one did not know if such an incident occurred in the first place.

Could there be a difference in the way in which the party works in DK where it has its own Janatam Sarkar? Or is it merely selective, citing cases where capital punishment was not awarded? Or is it my scepticism which left me wondering? I don't know. But the more I think I tend to believe that the JS in DK could not have survived and grown had they engaged in a killing spree.

Sukhlal drew attention to the high tension wires. He said that when the People's Militia in this area destroyed some towers last year the party called a meeting and criticized them and told them it was wrong. The party told them that by doing so they were affecting the poor in the cities who suffer more than anyone else because the rich have generators. The militia tried to justify it by saying that they thought this was a good way to entice the police to come with the repair team and then ambush them.

Did it mean that the people's militia could undertake ambushes on its own reckoning? My companions told me that generally the local party members and/or the PLGA would be informed. But at times there is a time lag and some militia do initiate actions. Did this mean that a militia at its own initiative can carry out attacks or action? Is that why there was frequent talk of ambushes here and there, land mine explosions, and so on? When I posed this question I was told that while ambushes do take place, the situation is such that each action has to be carefully planned and it takes time to plan because the PLGA is weaker than the enemy. However, if there is a sudden

attack or a surprise action takes place the militia must show initiative and therefore not all initiatives are taboo. But by and large they cannot afford to strike at will and become reckless. As a general rule they avoid engaging the ‘enemy’ unless they are prepared because one of the main objectives of the ambush is to acquire weapons.

On another occasion, referring to the allegation about the killing of two tribal youths as reported by the All India Radio for joining the Indian Army, a local commander of the PLGA said that his party always owned up to actions carried out by them, even if it went bad for them, which is why people like me criticize them. Although he hastily added that they do consider this to be ‘positive criticism’. But they cannot do anything about incidents which are not their doing. He pointed to what happened to the Gandhian social activist Himanshuji (of Vanvasi Chetna Ashram). All these years the party was accused of harassing him. Now it is the state which has demolished his ashram and falsely implicated many of his co-workers in criminal cases. Himanshuji himself was accused of working hand in glove with the Maoists and the police administration in Chhattisgarh refuses to allow him to even step into Bastar. Why did the police and the administration want a Gandhian out of their way? If the party did something wrong they were ready to apologize for it, but surely their party could not be blamed for killings which have nothing to do with them. In any case, they said, they were in a phase of strategic defence and when they act it is not only a military action but a political and organizational leap forward. Therefore, each action is planned.

When I asked a senior cadre about incidents of beheading or the use of detonators on a train in Jharkhand, there was a candid admission that it was not good for the party and that they have publicly admitted their mistake. I said that each time such mistakes are committed the party apologizes so how does it help advance the movement? Does it not raise questions about indiscipline? This was when I was told that he can answer questions about DK, with which they were familiar, but cannot speak about other areas.

But surely there must be a policy against reckless killings and procedures laid down to deal with them, such as the killings of the

CPI (M) party workers? Was it necessary to kill them? If they were corrupt and oppressing people and if people wanted revenge did the party go along with the people's demand or did they try to restrain them, pointing out that reckless killings will harm them as well as not win them friends? If urban middle classes are wrong in shedding tears over such killings how does the party intend to win them over to the side of the revolution? If the soldiers of the revolution cannot maintain discipline and engage in revenge killings, how does the party intend to win over the support of people? While one did not get any wiser about the general or the specific incidents raised and what was done, they also insisted that there was no need to engage in Dandakaranya versus Bihar–Jharkhand comparisons and that one must not jump to conclusions. Some of them appeared quite upset when these incidents of other areas were time and again brought up by me. On one particular occasion when this issue about reckless killings was being mentioned by me, the GS was present and he got visibly agitated and remarked that many people try to draw a comparison between the PW and the MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) styles of working when they are referring to DK and Jharkhand and thereby weaken the united party. I realized what he was getting at and told him that is not my intention. I told him that I could be wrong and in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal the movement, despite its different history, might actually be firmly anchored among people. But one could not ignore the fact that many of the recent incidents, which were most reprehensible, had occurred in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. True, the Indian public does not get to hear of the party's version of the incident and circumstances. So when they invited me I think they knew that I couldn't be silent about questions which trouble many like me.

He listened patiently but refused to answer questions, saying they did not believe in mindless violence. Another senior leader to whom these questions were repeated said he could not answer without reading the report of the state committee. While it is good that they refused to succumb to accepting criticism at face value, even from one 'quite supportive' of them, without first verifying facts, it was surprising that criticism levelled was not dismissed. When it was

suggested that if the party could not maintain discipline among its armed cadres maybe they should rethink whether their forces are politically equipped to fight a People's War, a senior leader inquired whether this was my personal opinion or a view shared by others. When told that this was an opinion shared by many, he nodded. Could their silence mean that they shared my concerns but were reluctant to say so because this would, through me, become public? I would like to believe that, because they were forthcoming as to what they did in DK.

But one cannot stop wondering—at what level does it get decided when, where and how an action is to be carried out? Is it decided by the party or the squad? If a squad carries out an action without the party's permission, especially one in which a dastardly act gets committed, what punishment is meted out? If there is a great deal of autonomy given to armed squads, then how does the party maintain discipline to ensure that their strategic objective does not get jeopardized by tactical errors?

Even after returning from the guerrilla zone I wondered, for instance, who okayed the Jamui massacre of 17 February 2010?[43] Or the use of detonators in the Tata–Bilaspur passenger train on 27 November 2009?[44] And why did the party fail to restrain people from carrying out executions in Lalgarh, if the party was opposed to it. Questions thrown at them were listened to but a response was not forthcoming except telling me that they would certainly take my criticism seriously. Was this a polite brush-off ? These thoughts did cross my mind. However, it was pointed out to me that the public might not know but disciplinary action is always taken. I asked, 'Will it not help to allow civil liberties groups to visit and look into these incidents and find out what the party's version was and how the matter was dealt with?' It was said that even if they were to be willing, the situation on the ground is not always conducive for easy entry and exit, and much planning and time is needed for making it possible. But could they consider this? Yes, I was assured that this would be put up before the central committee (CC) to discuss and decide. When I reminded them that non-funded Indian civil liberties

groups had appealed to the party to abide by and accept the Geneva Convention, especially Article 3 and Protocol II which deals with noninternational conflicts and spells out the dos and don'ts of the conduct of war, I was told they have not seen it. I also reminded them that in Nepal as well as in the Philippines their fellow Maoist parties have declared their adherence to these international norms. I was asked to provide them with documents. I promised them that I would do so.

In contrast to the reluctance to discuss the goings-on in other zones they were forthcoming about what is being done in DK. A copy of the public apology circulated by the DK special zonal committee party on 28 April 2009, addressed to the family of those killed in a landmine explosion on 16 April 2009, made for interesting reading. The poster-pamphlet provided a complete explanation and was meant to communicate. It said:

> We know by saying sorry your dear departed will not return nor our apology wipe out your tears. But we wish to tell you that our Party had no animosity with your dear ones. It was an accident. Government servants including police men and ordinary police personnel posted with paramilitary formations are not our enemy . . .
>
> You can then ask us why do we attack police and paramilitary forces? Why do we put land mines? Or why do we have to use 'violence'? In reality the system is responsible for this . . . You know very well that every peaceful agitation and struggle faces lathi-charge and bullets. We are neither extremists nor terrorists as is being propagated by this government of exploiting classes. We are children of workers, peasants and middle classes . . . We are organizing people in the backward tribal areas against their exploitation and oppression so that they can fight for their rights . . .

It goes on to point out that in and around Singaram in south Bastar on 4 January 2009, nineteen adivasis were killed, four of them women. The women were gang-raped first and then killed. In west Bastar's Minkapalli six adivasis were killed. Since 2005, at least 1000 adivasis have been killed, hundreds of women raped and 700 villages burnt.

> All this is being done to handover mineral wealth of DK forests to multinationals and foreign capitalists. It is this violence we have been compelled to answer with ‘violence’. Had we not resisted they would have succeeded in their objective. Of course jawans in police and paramilitary forces belong to ordinary peasant and worker families or middle class families but they have become tools in the hands of exploiters and are attacking those amongst whom they grew up. Killing, looting, raping, making illegal arrests, taking bribes . . . this is the common practice of the police force . . . Many a time we have distributed pamphlets appealing to them not to attack poor and exploited people. This is the context in which we use land mines and attack police and armed forces.

I also recalled something another visitor to the guerrilla zone once shared with me. I was told that in the late 1990s he had come across several instances of death sentences and he had shared his concern with party leaders. It appears his criticism was taken seriously and the following years saw a decline in such killings. This does point towards the fact that while they are guilty of commission of crimes they also show a capacity to change their ways. But I could not stop wondering about differences. For instance, unlike elsewhere the JS had taken roots in DK amongst people over the course of three decades where they, the party, has been able to create an alternative structure, virtually uncontested, over a relatively long and more stable condition. This allowed them to establish their hegemony through consent rather than coercion; this is reflected even in the Constitution of the JS. It is this ideological hegemony which is their source of strength and sustainability in DK. Is it the same elsewhere? Of course one must enter a caveat here: ideological hegemony could as well be consensual even in Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal because of other factors such as reforms carried out by the party, their unstinted work among the most oppressed sections of people, and organic unity between the people and party members drawn from amongst the most exploited stratum of society. But each area has a different history of struggle. While this could account for differences in the experience and practice between DK and other areas, it is difficult to know how vast the difference is and whether this creates vastly dissimilar conditions.

Judgement must be suspended until one has visited guerrilla zones in Bihar–Jharkhand.

However, this is a far cry from the ‘we-told-you-so’ attitude of the diehard critics or the ‘this-happens-in-class-war’ attitude of the diehard supporters, both of whom appear to be cut off from the struggle’s everyday reality. For all the pointed questions, not once did they appear dismissive. Even in their agitation I could see their readiness to engage with me in discussion. Although they were cagey speaking about other areas, they were forthcoming about what they do in DK and more than willing to respond to queries.

Why They Are Not Scared

It is normal to wonder what goes through people's minds when faced with the huge deployment of troops, with camps set up in such a way that the guerrilla zone is encircled and a virtual economic blockade (considered an act of war under international humanitarian law) is imposed. Do they not get scared? One answer was that 'we have to fight to establish people's power' (*apni rajya satta ke liye ladna padega*). If we get scared 'sarkar' will 'try to scare us even more'. This sounded too pat an answer for me. From where do they derive their confidence? One afternoon Sukhmati, a young woman soldier, was sent ahead to do a quick recce during my travel in a particularly dangerous stretch which fell between two camps of CRPF, when she went to survey the road flanked by two security force camps. She was also the last to leave. It was a particularly risky venture.

Are you not scared to undertake the riskiest part of the task, to be the first to reach the road and the last to leave? No, she was not. 'I have been seeing the police since I was a child. They used to enter my village and threaten us. I do not fear them any more.' Can hatred of the police conquer one's sense of fear? Perhaps it does. But how do they fight such a formidable force arrayed against them? My companions told me that they do not fear the state or Central forces since they have the advantage of fighting in their own terrain. But SPOs queer the pitch because these people come from forest villages that have some score to settle with the Maoists. It could be a former squad member expelled for extortion or rape or someone who belongs to the family of those traditional power wielders who have lost their privileged status under the JS. They know the forest paths and know about booby traps.

When Sonu, in charge of DK, was asked about the SPOs, he said that when Salwa Judum was launched in 2005 the same question was posed to them for six months. ‘The party was asked, what will you do now that villages are being attacked and burnt and party members and sympathizers are being hunted and killed. Many people told us to pull out from here altogether. Many mukhias, traders and teachers began to believe that the government will win this time and began to spread this line.’ Within six months the tables were turned.

By February 2006 the party responded. They were able to rally the people. First they did their utmost to rehabilitate those who got displaced inside the forests— mobilized and cautioned them that their displacement was meant to depopulate the forest land and hand it to mining corporations. Party members reminded them about the struggles led by their party against the forest department, forest contractors, the police as well as their own chiefs. They talked about the Bhumkal uprising against the British Raj, reminding them that without putting up a fight they stood no chance of securing the gains made by the people and asked them to join the People’s Militia to resist Salwa Judum. It appears easy enough. But to protect people escaping Salwa Judum hoodlums—provide them shelter, rehabilitate them, give them hope and courage—takes a lot of doing at a time when the party was being singled out for annihilation and had to fend off a vilification campaign by ‘neutral’ activists virtually justifying Salwa Judum by claiming that the party was to blame for causing it to happen. Yet, it would have been next to impossible for the Maoists to counter Salwa Judum had there not been people’s support to carry out this truly monumental task.

This is what the GS said in the interview he gave to Jan Myrdal and me:

> [P]eople are inviting us. Even new, less experienced cadres who are meagerly armed are being asked to visit these areas by the people. For example, [in] Sonebhadra in the [sic] Orissa, the villages invited us themselves. Then again our plans to expand from Raigad to Nayagad in the form of ‘Operation Ropeway’ under which the Nayagad Raid was orchestrate[d], enabled us to expand into a new

> area in as little as 8–10 months. So, the Nayagad raid not only had military significance but also political significance as there was [sic] strategic reasons behind the raid. Then again 'Operation Vikas' was undertaken to expand into the Manpur (Chhattisgarh) area in the plains. And people are inviting us and their confidence is on the high [sic]. If we expand in this way, we will grow definitely and expand the guerrilla war. If we proceed like this and successfully stretch the war, then in the longer run the political and economic situations are bound to change and under pressure the state will crumble. Presently, the state is willfully spending in military expenses, but as the war stretches and expand[s] into newer and newer areas, the more it will spend in the longer run it would lead to failure. We are waging our war with this strategic plan.

Three arguments were advanced about the spurt in struggle in Bastar in recent times, talking to adivasi peasants inside as well as in areas adjoining the guerrilla zone. Firstly, that the war launched by the government was being waged on behalf of the big corporations to grab adivasi land. They, the adivasi peasants, are being warned that if they do not give their consent and take the compensation being offered they will not only lose their land but might never receive compensation in their hands. This was intriguing. What was meant by saying they might not receive compensation? The village elders said that 'agents' of the company were warning them that if they do not accept the 'offer' their money will go to others. It was then explained that fraudulent cheques which bounced or cheques issued to persons other than the landowners have been quite frequent occurrences.

The other common refrain was how can monetary compensation being offered to them, in any way, be fair value for a land which has not only sustained them all this while but is their only guarantee to secure livelihood for the coming generations. It was pointed out that it's not just land—trees such as the sulfi, mango, tamarind, etc., also fetch them income as well as being consumed by them. The other thing was that the *vikas* (development) the government talks of is 'bunkum', having seen what was done in Bailadila. For all these years tribals have fended for themselves receiving paltry help from the government and now, when their land is wanted by corporations,

the government talks of ‘development’. They want the government to let them be. One old adivasi peasant said that if ‘they are so keen to bring “development” to us what stopped them, all these years, from developing agriculture?’

At a meeting inside the jungle when we were speaking to some elderly people they said something which stuck with us. ‘We are old and have lived our life, so even if I have to offer my life to stop the government from taking away our land I will do it because I must ensure that our children do not have to leave this land . . . all of us,’ he said, pointing to others of his generation, ‘are going to stay put and fight, let us see how many of us will be killed by the military. Do they think they can kill all of us? We know how to fight.’ The anger was visible. I asked what I should tell people outside. ‘Please tell them that their sarkar (government) is lying to them. Today they take away my land and forest, tomorrow they will take away my life. This forest and land is our life.’

When told that the Union minister of home affairs, P. Chidambaram, said to *Tehelka* that

> [i]n my mind I am completely convinced that no country can develop unless it uses its natural resources and human resources. Mineral wealth is wealth that must be harvested and used for the people. And why not? Do you want the tribals to remain hunters and gatherers? Are we trying to preserve them in some sort of anthropological museum? Yes, we can allow the minerals to remain in the ground for another 10,000 years, but will that bring development to these people? We can respect the fact that they worship the Niyamgirhi hill, but will that put shoes on their feet or their children in school? Will that solve the fact they are severely malnutritioned. And have no access to health care? The debate about mining has gone on for centuries. It is nothing new.

They said they were not the ones who are starving here. ‘We have helped those displaced by Salwa Judum.’ As for those outside the guerrilla zone ‘they too can benefit if the JS is allowed to reach them’. Did it mean that they do not want development? ‘No, we do not want these big capitalists from outside to loot us. We know what

happened in Bailadila.' This was the key word and catchphrase: 'Look what they did in Bailadila'.[45]

According to Sonu, the Salwa Judum period saw a huge jump in recruitment to the militia and the PLGA. He also pointed out that twice earlier, in 1990–91 and 1997–98, when the Jan Jagaran campaign was launched by the local exploiters, the police and the administration, the movement grew strong. Did this mean they expect the same to happen now when they were confronted, according to their own claim, by a force numbering a few lakhs in DK? The analogy drawn by the GS about the 'honey beehive' was recalled. If millions rise in revolt, then even this force, a few lakhs strong, is no match. But will people respond to their call? The confidence displayed, from senior to lay party members, the matter-of-fact response given by ordinary cadres, gives the impression that they believe people will put up a fight, even when they concede they have suffered losses in the shape of arrests of large numbers of leading cadres and the killing of scores of activists.

So what sustains them through thick and thin, malignant propaganda and loss of comrades? What do they do faced with setback and losses? What gives them the confidence and the courage to go on? 'Love and trust of people.' While the response appeared clichéd, this turned out to be a common refrain. When I asked Sujata she said, 'Did you ask the GS this question?' I told her I ask everyone I meet this one question. And that I was curious to get her response. Her reply was what else can it be but the 'love and affection of people'. This finds its way in the pamphlets too brought out by them from time to time. Another pamphlet which is part of their recruitment drive (from 2 December 2009 to 10 February 2010) for the PLGA, carries an appeal to unemployed boys and girls of Bastar not to join the government's armed forces. The leaflet says that when one joins the PLGA

> you will not get any salary but food, clothes, personal needs will be fulfilled and your families would be helped by the Janatam Sarkar. What you will earn will be love and affection of the people. Whereas those who join government armed forces will get salary and right to

> loot, kill and rape but also earn undying hatred of the people and you will not be remembered. Instead your death will be celebrated.

Another leaflet tells the personnel of government-armed forces that their war is akin to the wars waged by foreign aggressors against our people. Towards the end the leaflet thus addresses those joining the government-armed forces: ‘Government does not regard you as anything more than animals. Indeed no better than slaves. Sometimes you are called dogs (greyhound), sometimes snakes (cobra) and sometimes Cats (Black cats).’

The flip side of ‘love and affection’ finds its way into another pamphlet brought out by the Dandakaranya special zonal committee for the three-day bandh (25–27 January 2010), which contained an appeal to the police and paramilitary forces inviting them to ponder why the government has launched ‘operation green hunt’. The pamphlet, after reminding them that they are fighting a war in the interest of the capitalists and foreign multinationals, and that they are being asked to ‘to kill and get reward, or get killed and receive compensation’ reminds them of their class roots and to cease using their weapons against their own class brethren and earn people’s hatred.

There is further substantiation for this. In an interview Supriya Sharma did with an SPO for the *Times of India*[46], this unnamed SPO says:

> If you work for the Naxals you don’t get any money. Once a year a pant and a gamcha (towel). If it tears you have to stitch it and wear it again. People here want to work, build homes, buy cars. But where will they earn the money from. I had a tractor but no money for fuel. On top of it, the Naxals said do not sell paddy. Give it to the poor. Is that fair? The poor of course were happy with them. The poor are their biggest support base . . . First I trained with the Nagas (CRPF Naga Bn). Then I was sent to train with the Army in Kashmir. But I tell you, the training was nothing in comparison with the training given by Naxals. They have a lot of ‘jazba’ (enthusiasm) . . . (police) still do not fully trust us (adivasis).

This confidence and strength to carry on against all odds did not happen overnight. It took thirty years of sacrifices, tough life and

selfless work by hundreds of young men and women, to move from being a handful to becoming a mass movement—to establish themselves in such a way that today the second, and even the third, generation predominantly comprises adivasis when one speaks of the movement in DK. Raju told me smilingly that the third generation is getting ready. I could not fathom what he meant. I asked him to explain. He said that in 2009 the party started a Basic Communist Training School where twenty-five or thirty kids in the age group of twelve to fifteen are selected and for six months they go through an intensive training. They are introduced to the basic concepts of MLM (Marxism, Leninism and Maoism), taught languages (Hindi and English), maths, social science, shown different types of weapons and how to operate a computer. They also get to do practical work by joining a work team of the RPC and put in a couple of weeks of work before passing out. In 2010 they planned to introduce this in other divisions too.

Even otherwise, Maoists are predominantly adivasis indistinguishable in nativity, language and lifestyle from their ethnic brethren. Of course there were party members from AP, Bengal, Bihar and elsewhere. It is said that one acquires much of the body language and speech modulation of a dominant group over a period. The interesting bit was that it was the marginalized culture of the tribals which dominated. So unlike the Indian ruling classes mimicking their colonial masters or imbibing Brahminical culture, the Maoists were assimilating themselves with the people's culture. It was difficult for me to know who was from outside and who indigenous, as everyone looked more or less the same and spoke and wrote Gondi. I do not know Gondi or any Indian language other than Hindi and can follow with some labour Bengali and Punjabi. But what was apparent was that the language being spoken mostly, and understood by everyone around, was Gondi. There were a few occasions when I heard people conversing in Telugu, although neither Telugu nor Hindi is an alien language in DK for a number of reasons.

But the difficulty in distinguishing between tribals and non-tribals remained. One learnt this on the very first morning of our visit to the

guerrilla zone. On reaching the spot where we were to halt for the night we were introduced to a number of persons including someone who we were told was the GS. None of this registered with our body and mind fatigued by the long day and the seven-hour-long trek. Next morning when we sat down to eat our breakfast, we inquired whether we would get to meet some party leader and if so who it would be. To our consternation we were told, ‘Comrades, you met the GS yesterday and he will be meeting you again later.’ We did not realize that the person we were introduced to was the GS because there was nothing to distinguish him from the other PLGA cadres. While we fumbled with some lame excuse, this was to repeat itself again and again as one could not, until explicitly introduced, make out who was who.

The confidence, therefore, also stems from the fact that most of the cadres here are indigenous. The GS told us that it is not easy to survive the tough life demanded of party members in DK. Because they are constantly on the move and hardly ever stay in the same place for too long, they cannot accumulate things and have to rely on sharing. This could be most unsettling because constantly being on the move affects a person both physically and psychologically. A spartan life with nomad-like movement throughout the year is far removed even from the simple life led by the most austere person. This life is not led for a few weeks or months but for years together. Instead of losing steam or getting dispirited or letting their resolve weaken, to still carry on and be able to work, write, engage and reflect requires tremendous commitment. While writing this I was reminded of the dialogue from the Hindi film *Paan Singh Tomar* where the ‘rebel’ says that it is the ‘principle of sports that you finish what you start whether you lose or win’. This is the spirit with which Maoists too commit themselves to revolution. Whether they die or live, win or lose, they will not give up their fight to end the unjust system they are determined to overthrow. Murali, a senior leader, said that out of the two squads which entered the Bastar region in 1980, only two members, he and Kosa Usendi, remain. The rest have either been killed, become medically unfit or just could not cope with the spartan life inside the forest. The GS told us that many a

comrade who came from other parts of the country wanted, after a few months, to give up full-time party work and quit the forest. This also meant that cadres from outside have a higher turnover and cannot be the main bulwark for the party. The party must have taken roots among the people, therefore, to grow and survive.

With such roots among the tribal masses why does the party not want to function openly? Murali said that mass organizations of the party may not be registered but they are there all right and function to the extent that these unregistered organizations spearhead struggles and enter into negotiations, as and when the situation warrants. The GS said that it is important to guard against getting bogged down in legalism and economics and forget that the masses have to be prepared for the seizure of power. In the interview he delved into the various trends within the Naxalbari movement and how one after another various sections began to move away from the path of 'area-wise seizure of power' and began speaking about preparing the masses for armed insurrection and/or exposing the Parliament from within as an instrument of class rule. To work without the Parliament system getting exposed was like to 'function legally until it becomes too late to function at all'.

However, something a senior member said struck me as being quite important. He said that the party is doing a lot of work among the tribal people. The encouragement given to the Gondi language, efforts to create a Gondi script, social reforms even while preserving tribal customs, political mobilization of the tribals, etc., tend to strengthen their identity as Gondi nationals. With the advent of Salwa Judum, the party's appeal has also become multi-class, in so far as the party constantly warns against threats to tribals from corporate land grab, etc. Suppose, I queried, as a cumulative result of campaigns outside and propaganda inside, tribal identity politics asserts itself and there is a demand for a separate state for Gondi-speaking people, what would be the party's response? Would this not undercut the party's class-based approach towards tribal society?

The answer was their party would not oppose this demand. This is something they would welcome because this is a part of the party's

approach towards the nationality question. As for a class-based approach, that would remain because they are anchored among the most deprived sections of the tribal society and the party does not want to lead this nationality struggle. However, tribal people will always know who their real friends are. In other words the party did not fear an assertion of tribal identity. Rather they perceived it to be a favourable development which will enable them to survive and grow politically.

The significance of what was said can only be grasped by its context. In India there has been a divergence in the stance taken by the Left movement on the issue of nationalities. While leftists in general are opposed to assimilation, in which minorities or oppressed groups more or less lose their cultural identity, there are differences within the Left on the issue of what stance to take and one can say that the divide is between those who argue for integration with equality versus those who subscribe to separateness with equality, and the course to be adopted to achieve that. Maoists believe that there are oppressed nationalities. This includes the tribals whose desire for equality with separateness must be respected in order for them to develop and preserve their culture. Thus they argue that while they support the right of nationalities to self-determination, every occasion where separateness is evoked does not mean secession. Tribals, unlike Kashmiris or Nagas or Meitis, are not demanding secession but may want to exercise the right of self-determination to carve out a separate state. The significant fact is that whether a separate Gondi-speaking state gets carved out or not, the Maoists' confidence stems from the fact that in DK they are rooted among the tribals and as a result, whether or not a separate state gets demanded and accepted, Maoists will remain an integral and intrinsic part of society. Therefore, they did not expect to become politically marginalized.

During discussions, conversation veered towards what has been happening across the world in terms of ideological debate—between those who advocate working for the seizure of state power and others who instead work for inclusionary politics by remaining a social movement retaining the open fluid form. Somehow the party

and the trade union, etc., are seen as closed and undemocratic to begin with. Perhaps remaining a social movement and forming a power bloc without threatening to overthrow the existing State was the way out? It was not denied that there are problems. The GS spoke about how partial results or reforms were ignored previously though they provide respite to the people, and all emphasis was placed on ultimate seizure of power. He stressed that the party now acknowledges the need to combine the immediate with the ultimate, something which was either overlooked or dismissed in the name of frittering away people's energy. This was particularly important because one of the criticisms against the Maoists was that they tended to not just oppose reforms but also oppose those who advocate reform. The emphasis has shifted and much of the time is devoted to strengthen what they describe as 'people's economy'.

Did they allow welfare work being carried out by the government and its agencies? If so, do they allow it in the guerrilla zones? Will it not undercut their effort to establish their own rule? The answer was that while they are unable to provide help to the people themselves they are not opposed to any activity which benefits the people, be it health, education, employment guarantee, etc. However, where they are in control they undertake reforms which benefit people. They also said that they do not, for instance, interfere with routine patrols by police and paramilitary forces because they do not want to engage them in combat unless they are prepared.

As for the difference between the response towards reforms in areas where the Janatam Sarkar runs and areas where it does not, this is what the GS had to say:

> In areas where the enemy (security force) camps are located, even in those villages, we have Revolutionary People's Committees where work is still going on. Hundreds of people built up ponds in complete knowledge of the security forces in the camps.

But time and again we were told that Maoists are not against any pro-people reforms such as those being introduced in areas where their own movement is not strong or in control and, therefore, where they were unable to provide succour to the people. There they fight

for implementation of these reforms. It brought to mind the invitation extended by the party in Jharkhand to a team of officials from the Planning Commission during their visit to the state team to meet the party's state leaders and discuss the issue of rural poverty. However, where they run a parallel administration and are strong they undertake their own reforms by 'strengthening people's economy by encouraging cooperative movement'. That is, they undertake reforms in such a way so as to harness the collective energy of the people in improving their material conditions, rather than waiting for someone to come and bail them out.

In contrast, in the Integrated Action Plan for seventy-eight districts (designated as most backward/ Naxal-affected districts), the MHA succeeded in getting the district collector to head the committee with the SP and the district forest officer as two members. Thereby the original proposal of the Planning Commission to get the gram sabha or the panchayati raj institutions (PRI) to supervise the disbursement of funds was dropped. The argument was that the PRI was defunct in most of these districts and precious time would get lost if the PRI was to be set in motion first. Interestingly, the Union Cabinet also did away with the conditionality suggested by the Planning Commission, namely that no liquor contractor be allowed in tribal areas and that the FRA be enforced in these districts. This merely reflects the lack of confidence in the local bodies which are closer to people, in contrast to relying on functionaries of the State.[47]

The report of the Expert Group constituted by the Planning Commission to look into 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Area' is also instructive in this regard. It said that

> the purpose of the report (is) to see how the government may eliminate the causes of unrest by constitutional and legal means and restore faith of the affected population in the system of governance, established by the constitution and law (3.1.3).

Thus, in contrast to the paternalism or benevolence of the State as expressed by the Planning Commission constituted committee, as though some favour was being bestowed on the people in return for them not taking to armed resistance, the party pursued a line to

enable people, the most oppressed in particular, to take the lead, to struggle and realize their aspirations by participating in the making of their own destiny. Between the two approaches lies a seminal difference.[48]

But we were also told that while the party welcomes reforms they are aware that this forms part of counter-insurgency operations as well, a part of 'repression and reforms'. The idea is to first terrorize people so that they begin to see reforms as relief and begin to believe that something is being done. This also goes by the name of 'winning hearts and minds' or WHAM under which various programmes are being launched. Thus in Bijapur, Dantewada, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Chatra, Palamu, Hazaribagh and Gaya districts, as part of pilot projects, various programmes are being promoted and these go by the names of Janmabhoomi, Vana Sanrakshan Samiti, Astha Shibir, Yuva Shakti, Gaonbandi, Three-Tent Programmes, etc. Also it is being propagated that socialism and communism are outdated, defeated ideologies and that revolution cannot succeed. A senior party member said it is significant that it is the Indian government propagating that it is necessary to use violence to save the people from the perils of communism and eradicate the Maoist menace. This is a way, Sonu said, to prepare the Indian people to get used to the violent suppression of people's movements and to accept this as something necessary. This is also meant to send the message that the Indian State is very strong and it's only a matter of time before they rid the country of this 'menace'. But he said 'they are prepared'. The party, he said, read the Salwa Judum for what it was, namely as the beginning of an all-out offensive.

Sonu had also pointed out that the objective behind Salwa Judum was 'to drain the water to catch the fish and to create "strategic hamlets". The government thought we would get finished'. He said that earlier when the party used the term 'fascist', people could not understand what was meant by it. But with Salwa Judum this became possible. Thus Salwa Judum became a good teacher—negative, no doubt, but it helped clear confusion. Many opponents of

the party changed their views when they saw large scale displacement accompanied by burning, looting and raping. Others realized that Salwa Judum was meant to get rid of the movement so that something that had served them well, i.e., the JS, was destroyed, their organized strength whittled down, and/or their forest land could then be handed over to corporations.

How It All Began

Every encounter and everything one read, heard or observed only ignited the desire to know how the movement took roots here because only then can we understand what has been achieved in thirty years. Since 2004 the party has expanded beyond DK, which comprised old Bastar (comprising five districts of Chhattisgarh) and Gadchiroli (Maharashtra), into Manpur and Mainpur which are largely non-forest plain areas. For administrative reasons the area where the party is working has been divided into ten divisions: the Bastar area (comprising five districts of Bastar, Kanker, Bijapur, Dantewada and Jagdalpur) has been divided into six divisions, while Gadchiroli is divided into two divisions. These, along with Manpur and Mainpur, form ten divisions. In the entire DK area, it is the Koya and Dorla tribes that are the predominant adivasi communities. Others comprise the Halbi, the Batra and the Pradhan. There are some Dalit sections as well as the Mahar community of Maharashtra who also live in sizable numbers in this area. Other than these there are some non-adivasi communities like Sahu. The Koya and Dorla communities are together referred to as Gonds and therefore the name Gondwana. The total Gond population, covering parts of the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, approximately number seven million. The movement is spread over approximately 45,000 square kilometres and where the party exercises control in the eight divisions of DK, it roughly covers a population of seven million. A senior leader Sonu told us that throughout its history, the people of this area have fought against exploitation and for their land and livelihood. They have had a relatively democratic way of life in accordance with the tribal tradition, more democratic than what prevailed in the rest of India.

They have never submitted to oppression without a fight. In fact from 1825 to 1964 there have been ten to eleven recorded uprisings under various tribal leaders. Nearly fourteen years before the party entered this area, in 1966, the people of Bastar rose against the then Congress-led government under their Raja. It was ‘after a lull of 15 years, we entered this area in 1980’. Two squads of PW members entered DK in 1980. That was how it began.

Murali was a member of the first squad to enter DK in 1980. According to him,

> after the setback of Naxalbari, in 1978 the Karimnagar and Adilabad peasant movement was started in Andhra Pradesh. In 1977 the Party had decided to organize ‘Go to Village Campaign’. Accordingly, in 1978 in Telangana, coastal areas of AP, youth and students from the Radical Students Union and the Radical Youth League along with party professionals organized political schools for ten days to prepare for ‘Go to Village Campaign’. At the village level, a democratic revolution against feudalism was the agenda and appeals were made to the villagers through pamphlets, posters and rallies.

The task carried out was a class analysis of the area. It became evident that in Gadchiroli

> there was not that much exploitation from money lenders, but it came from the forest department. Alongside there were other contradictions, but the primary one being the state versus people. In Bastar, there was land problem. Here there was contradiction between the people as well as of forest dwellers with the forest department. There was lesser exploitation than Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh. Although tribals were divided into classes, yet contradictions here were not as sharp as in Telangana plain areas. There was a class society here, but due to the tribal traditions, unlike plains the Mukhia/Manjis exploitation did not appear sharp.

In the areas where the squad members first entered Telugu was understood and spoken, both in Bastar as well as Gadchiroli. So not knowing the Gondi language was not a problem initially. However, without knowing Gondi the squad members sent here could not have managed to survive for long. Now, one important contribution of the Naxalbari movement was to encourage middle class activists to live

and work among the peasant masses. Therefore learning the language spoken by the people and living like them became a part of the struggle every activist knew he had to go through. But learning a language such as Gondi, which was neither written nor had a script of its own, must have been a difficult proposition. I put this question to Murali, who was part of the first squad to enter DK. Yes, he said, it was tough and it took some time to first translate what was said in Gondi into Telugu and then to slowly learn the different words. Then it was easier to learn to follow what was being said in Gondi than to speak. But eventually we began to speak in Gondi. 'So yes, it took some doing to learn the language but if you are fired by a desire to live and work among people you do pick up languages rather easily.' Yes, in hindsight what must have taken several months for some and a year or two for others to learn looks easy, but to do it when you do not know a language, in unfamiliar surroundings does require a lot of self-motivation and self-discipline.

A book called *The Dandkaranaya Literary Movement: A Study*, put together by Dandakaranya Writers, probably in 1992, captures the mood of those early years, despite literary excesses. As the Sircilla and Jagtiyal tribal peasant struggle spread between 1977 and 1979 in north Telangana, a need was felt to

> broaden the scope of the movement. The Party gave a call to carry the Jagtiyala message to more villages and to the interior forests . . . The party comrades went into Dandkaranya . . . with caps on their heads, live green dresses, guns on their shoulders, kits on their backs. They formed into Dalam (squads) . . . The Godavari invited us. Our footsteps introduced us to Indravelli. Pranahite and Indravati invited us to go with them. Penganga, Vainganga, Sabari and Sileru promised to introduce us to each village . . . We crossed rivers. We wiped off the boundaries of the states. We did not mind any language differences. We went into valleys and forests. We saw the wealth of the forests. We saw the frightened lives of those people who ran at the sight of us. We saw their houses. We moved into their clans. We read their hearts. It's a different world . . . Telugu songs did not work in the interior forests. They were not concerned with a Telugu subject. We faced this problem while expanding . . . Gradually we had to learn another language . . . In any Garden or home we went to, any dada

> or bai (woman we talked to, we were asked ‘Bore?’ (Who is it?) And then they said ‘Borayo’ (Who knows?) . . . In these circumstances . . . the pains that our colleagues went through to translate every word of the Gond language came back to us as fond remembrances. By translating Jana Natya Mandali’s songs into the Gond language ‘Sahu’ laid the foundation for translation into tribal language. After that many more did such work . . . In this process there were some whose patience, strength and faith in people fizzled out. They sank to the depths of abandoning the revolution, the gun and the pen and their cherished ideal. It is painful that Sahu who had introduced revolutionary literature to the tribals had to choose a path that distanced him from the tribals . . . We sang to the bamboo labourers. We took up the tendu leaf struggle that is like an industry for a month for men, women, children and old. We explained to the people their position, the exploitation of the contractors and the value of the forest produce.[49]

And so it goes on to describe the literature which emerged as part of the movement.

So the difficulties encountered in the initial years, I feel, get flattened over time or become part of the literary imagination and it is only when we get to read some old document that these jump out to remind us that it must have been very tough trying to get to know the people among whom they had come to work. To fight disease, face losses due to illness or police actions and, far worse, to motivate themselves when no one knew the outcome, must not have been easy by any stretch of imagination. Some lost hope or got weary or just could not take to the tough life and quit. But many did not give up. It also shows that just as love conquers all, including overcoming language/ cultural barriers, so does commitment to fight oppression. By linking the learning of language with the composition of songs, which speak about tribal people’s exploitation and struggles, the process of learning, getting to know people and gaining their trust became possible. To say that Maoist cadres went with a song on their lips is not metaphorical but literal. Because songs and plays were the forms through which they explained their politics, the exploitation of the adivasis, and exhortation to organize themselves to throw out their oppressors.

The first squads were already familiar with the socio-economic surveys or the class analysis of the villages they visited. These surveys helped the party decide to focus on the ‘main contradiction’ between State versus people, given the long history of oppression under the state’s forest department. Sonu told us that initially it took some time for the people to trust the party. One of the first things the party did and which won them a lot of appreciation was what Kobad Gandhy told the BBC interviewer, that party members taught villagers to boil water which brought down infant mortality by 50 per cent. People became receptive to what the party had to say.

How was trust gained? The first struggle launched in this area was against the forest department since the primary problem was that of land and forest produce. The forest department had enormous amounts of land under its authority and also exercised control over forest products from tendu patta and tamarind to bamboo. Although they claimed they were aware of the tensions between the tribal chiefs and the people, people hesitated to say anything against them. ‘They did not know much about us and probably feared that they would face the brunt of the chief ’s revenge if the party left them on their own.’ Therefore in the initial years the party focused on issues that concerned the entire adivasi population and found that the antagonism between the tribals and the forest department was the main issue. But even then, and this is an important difference between the Maoists and other branches of CPI (ML), they distinguished themselves by taking up class issues even in tribal society. Thus the party concentrated on mobilizing the poorest among the tribals and put into practice the principle whereby the most oppressed section of the tribal population became the cornerstone of their attempts to mobilize the adivasis. It is around this that other sections of the tribal society were mobilized by taking up issues of common concern to them. Mass organizations, which initially started being built, were peasant organizations where women also took part; later separate women’s organizations were built to take up issues for their emancipation. One of the prime issues around which the party mobilized the people was regarding the labour rate for tendu leaf collection or for cutting bamboo. In this

largely underdeveloped area, the contractors used to pay extremely low rates, lower than even the rate decided by the government. Against this, from 1981 onwards the party began to mobilize adivasi peasants.

It was in the course of this struggle that people gained confidence about the party as they observed how party members worked in the movement against the forest department and contractors. Murali said that in Gadchiroli area, where Ballarpur Paper Mills had the lease for the bamboo forests, they used to pay a rupee for six bundles (each bundle had twenty sticks) of bamboo. He said that the earlier practice was that the company's agent would meet the mukhia and fix the rate in a private deal with him and this is how rates would get fixed. Ordinary adivasis had no say in the matter. This lasted up to 1983 when the party began an agitation which saw the rates rise to a rupee for three bundles, then in 1984 Re 1 for two bundles . . . right now it is Rs 7 for each bundle. Similarly, a bundle of tendu leaves (seventy leaves in a bundle) used to fetch 3 paise, whereas it is now more than a rupee per bundle. These struggles and successes helped the party win the confidence of the people. These were in the nature of a wage struggle. Today, said Murali proudly, in most parts, where adivasis have been organized by the party, they earn higher than the minimum wages.

How did the party deal with company managers or contractors? Murali said it took some years before the 'managers' of the company became convinced that they could not bypass the 'party' or negotiate with anyone else to get a better deal for the contractors or the company. It was then that bribes began to be offered. At one such meeting one of the 'agents' told the party representatives that the party activists have ensured the welfare of the tribals, so now they should think of their own welfare. Murali said that the party cadres turned on the agents and asked them that since they only worked for 'owners' and are not owners themselves, why are they so loyal to their masters? 'What harm will it do to you if you were to pay a fair price to the adivasis? If you have money to pay us bribes surely you have money to pay fair prices to the tribals.' After that encounter these agents stopped trying to bribe them.

These successes laid the foundation for the party's consolidation and expansion. Sonu pointed out that when adivasis join they do not join in a trickle; more or less entire villages get mobilized and this is where the tradition of collective activity among tribals acts as an enabling factor. It was thereafter that people began to share the problems they faced from their tribal chiefs, i.e., *majhi*s and mukhias. By 1984 the forest liaison committee was constituted in DK for the coordination of the movement. In 1987, a state committee was elected, but due to the absence of a centrallevel committee it worked under the AP state committee. It was in 1989 that a DK-wide adivasi peasant organization was formed in the shape of Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS). Today it boasts of a membership of more than 1,00,000 members. Under this organization, men and women have fought for land rights, particularly of landless peasants, under the slogan 'land to the tillers'.

The Issue of Land

The problem of land was the most serious issue. Not only did the adivasi peasantry face the illegal and extralegal exactions of the forest department which affected all adivasis, internally in addition, they faced the domination of their chiefs, which meant they had to labour on the land of their chiefs. Only on the completion of this task could they tend to their own fields. Not only did the majhis, patels, sarpanch, etc., own more land, failure to obey meant that they had to pay fines in the form of alcohol, a goat or even in some cases face being ostracized. This was as true of areas which had taken to settled cultivation as those where *penda* (shifting cultivation) was practised. Basically it meant that adivasis depended on a single crop but could tend to their farms only after tending to the fields of their chiefs. Tribals could not begin the sowing process unless animal sacrifice was offered to the village pujari. Thus by the time they came to tend their own fields, the monsoon would be receding making their already precarious condition even more uncertain. This also further created a relationship of bondage to their chiefs. In addition landless or land-poor adivasis were numerous. Paucity of land and low yields forced many to work as agricultural labourers. They worked either as *naukar*, i.e., free labour receiving seasonal wages or as *kabadi* or attached labour with a large landowner, getting food in lieu of wages.[50]

Furthermore, penda had been banned except in Abujmaad by the forest department, without commensurate improvement in settled cultivation, which also contributed to low yields pushing them into servitude, as many a cadre pointed out to me.

Sonu proudly said:

> [T]here is almost no landless peasantry here today; however, initially there were in considerable number. Three lakh (3,00,000) acres of forest land were won over. So the first struggle within the village was launched around the land movement. The tribal chiefs had a lot of land under their power. But once that was acquired along with the forest land, the standard of living in this area took an upward turn. In the initial years, there was dearth of food as well. Now people get food twice a day and they also possess land. The struggle against the forest department was thus combined with the struggle against the tribal chiefs.

But it is one thing to distribute land and quite another to ensure that agriculture prospers. In the entire Bastar and Gadchiroli region, only 2 per cent of the land was irrigated. The movement took it upon itself to start building irrigation tanks at the village level. Along with this, there was a new phenomenon introduced in the form of the development of a cooperative system. Three–four families started to plough the land. Even while building houses or doing other useful work, cooperative teams of eleven members each were constituted. It is noteworthy that the Constitution of the JS mentions the following:

> Though there is private ownership over land, it (JS) will encourage collective work through mutual labor cooperation of the peasants in leveling the land, tilling, transplantations, weed removing, harvesting, growing vegetables, raising fruits, fish, cattle and other such agricultural and agriculture related works. It will thus develop the cooperative movement. It will strive to increase productivity and production so as to fulfill the necessities of food grains to the people and give importance to the development of agriculture. The collective lands, collective plantations, collective ponds, fish raising and other such things shall be in the control of this (agriculture) department.

These mutual labour cooperatives or work teams were built from a class perspective. ‘Putting the poorer peasant families along with the rich peasantry would have meant by the time they ploughed their own land, the monsoon would come to an end,’ said Kumma, a peasant who came from a family of poor farmers and was now in charge of developing cooperative farms in the RPC to which he belonged. The cooperative system, as it emerged, led to the

development of a feeling of collectivity and unity. But in this the party learned from the people too since tribals were used to working collectively and working towards consensus. So it was not something new for them. Except what was being attempted was radically different. It was not tradition that was being invoked but modern ideas coming into play. To discuss exploitation by contractors or tendu patta wage rates or how to improve agriculture or why aid should go to help the poor tribals first . . . all these were new experiences.

There was land now in the hands of those who were earlier landless or land-poor. Now there was some irrigation available which led to a marked improvement in the standard of living. Increasing agricultural production is of great importance, especially in order to overcome unevenness in development. Some areas were relatively more developed than others and in some areas the party had been working far longer than in other parts. Besides, in some parts shifting cultivation is still practised whereas there are parts where tractors are employed for ploughing. In between there is settled cultivation which uses shovels for ploughing, which obviously does not turn the soil deep enough and elsewhere cattle are used for ploughing. (The platoon which accompanied me to Abujmaad had two members who had never tasted fresh milk or yogurt because cattle were absent where they came from.) As part of the policy to improve agriculture, the JS had bought 106 pairs of buffalos for use in Abujmaad. Fourteen buffalos died leaving them with ninety-two buffalos. Now villagers who had switched to settled cultivation were being taught how to plough and also to train the animals to be harnessed for ploughing. But local RPC members Narsingh and Kumma, who showed me several collective farms, told me that they found penda cultivation to be superior to more elementary forms of settled cultivation. One advantage with penda is that not only are yields higher but, along with Kohla or Kosra grain, a number of other crops can also be grown simultaneously.

White Terror

From what one learnt about the progress of the Maoists in DK it appears that by the end of the 1980s the DK movement had reached the zonal level, i.e., peasant and women's organizations were now operating at the zonal level which encompassed tribal areas across states, and recruitment to People's Militia was on the rise. But state repression was also increasing. A stage had come by then when the villagers had reposed their confidence in DAKMS as their own organization. Since tribals traditionally had the practice of participating collectively, every villager began participating in it. Sonu said that

> (t) he old tradition of collective participation of the adivasis was exploited by the party in the initial years for the purpose of the revolution. Now that they themselves started understanding the advantages of organization and the party, it raised the consciousness level of the people to the extent that they could clearly demarcate the contradictions between the people and the chiefs as well as the people and the state. So, the alignment also was very clear to them. The chiefs sided with the state, while the party and people came together.

There was a growing realization accordingly among the people, that if they needed to maintain their right over the land, they would have to organize themselves and fight. Or else the state and the chiefs would seize every opportunity to grab it back. 'So the party, as well, gave the direction that if you organize and arm yourself, then you will be able to protect your rights.' There was a spurt in recruitment to the party as a consequence.

It was around then that the first Jan Jagaran (People's Awareness) campaign was launched by the Madhya Pradesh state government in 1990–91. As the tribal chiefs lost their land as well as their

traditional status, DAKMS was steadily replacing them. ‘So naturally, the state and chiefs colluded in organizing the first white terror campaign in 1990–91 in the form of Jan Jagaran.’

In 1991, repression started in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and in the Bastar region in Madhya Pradesh. Dozens of party members were killed between 1991 and 1994. Sukhlal, who was from a village in Gadchiroli, told me that his village was attacked fifteen times. He was then in his early teens. It was at this time, said Sonu, that the party took the decision to fight against the state. It is since then, in 1991, that action against the state forces began to be taken, and the process towards forming a guerrilla zone started being developed. By now all village problems were being referred to DAKMS. Both the traditional chieftains and the government panchayat system were losing ground. ‘This was a form of power transfer in the clearest terms.’ Even the patwaris stopped coming to villages for revenue collection. However, the party observed a power vacuum and realized that DAKMS could not fill this vacuum. By 1994, the decision to create people’s power organs was formally taken. And in 1995 the All India Special Conference was held where the party ratified the decision of building power organs called gram rajya committees, a body elected by all villagers above the age of eighteen, and the main focus was to concentrate on the development of agriculture.

As the mukhia’s traditional privileges and the government’s panchayat system began receding and embryonic forms of people’s power emerged, a clash between the two powers was inevitable. As people’s power consolidated, the state reacted again with a second ‘white terror’ campaign in the name of Jan Jagaran II in 1997.

In this campaign many local comrades were tortured, houses were burnt and people were threatened into surrender. One comrade, for instance, was killed publicly in a public meeting, creating an atmosphere of terror. But the party also developed a military force at the level of squads and carried out actions. A famous or infamous incident was the killing of one Masa of village Vedire who was said to be a cruel and notorious village chief. Thus selected people were killed. This phase lasted for six to eight months.

However, the attack which started on 5 June 2005, in the name of Salwa Judum was qualitatively different both in extent and scope from the previous two Jan Jagaran campaigns. While the first two had been largely organized at a local level, this third one was the product of coordinated planning from the local level through the state to the Centre. Both the state police and Central paramilitary forces along with the local-level Salwa Judum gangs were unleashed on the people with a long-term perspective.

The development and strengthening of the people's movement since 2004, after the formation of CPI (Maoist) had made them the primary target of the State, and it is apparent that this emergence of a united party enabled them to mount a formidable resistance to corporate takeover of forest land. Already there had been a noticeable shift in the Indian government's stance towards Naxalites by 1998 when under the leadership of L.K. Advani, the then minister of home affairs of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, Naxalites and Maoists were elevated as posing a threat to 'internal security'. However, by the time Congress party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) under Manmohan Singh took over in 2004, there was a further lurch towards the policy of suppression. It was the UPA government which identified the Maoist party as the 'single biggest internal security threat' in the country. This despite the fact that in 2004– 05 Maoists had been dealt a severe blow in Andhra Pradesh where they lost, according to party estimates, 1600 cadres. The anti-Maoist operations in AP had gained momentum in October 2004 and carried on throughout 2005. Coincidentally, Salwa Judum formally started in June 2005, but it was preceded by months of preparation.[51]

Salwa Judum was a premeditated, coordinated and planned assault to stem any consolidation of people's power, which held out the biggest challenge to the implementation of MoUs signed by the Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand governments for mineral extraction and mineral-based industries. Starting from 5 June and up to December 2005, the terror campaign was at its peak. In particular, two blocs of Bhairamgarh and Bijapur were selected for maximum

assault and in the whole process at least 644 villages were destroyed and people displaced. According to government records 3,50,000 people were displaced. Only 56,000 were accounted for, who had been kept in thirty-three ‘concentration camps or what they call relief camps’, said Sonu. Another 35,000 tribals sought refuge in AP. However, the government still fights shy to account for the rest. Sonu said ‘majority people are with us’. A destructive campaign was undertaken so that the people who have been forced into the camps lead a miserable life, while the villagers who dared to return to their own villages still largely live in jungles as the repression in the form of indiscriminate looting, killings and rapes continued.

It was against this background that the party began to counter Salwa Judum. Starting January 2006 a planned campaign against it was taken up. While the party began its campaign against Salwa Judum, the state propaganda of projecting it as an independent and spontaneous movement of the people and as some kind of a democratic revolution had been thoroughly exposed. The party called people to join the militia for survival. As part of that the Koya Bhoomkal Militia was formed and inaugurated on 10 February 2006, the name linking it to the Bhoomkal uprising of 1910. According to the party thousands of people joined the militia to fight for their existence. Instead of Salwa Judum becoming a ‘spontaneous resistance of tribals against the Maoists’, what actually happened was the resistance of the tribals against the state-sponsored terror campaign. Sonu explained ‘[t] he people, the PLGA, the party, the mass organizations and the campaigns at the national and international levels came together in the shape of a big movement for which the party is grateful to the democratic forces of the country’.

In the party’s assessment the worst phase of Salwa Judum was halted by May–June 2006. According to Sonu, Salwa Judum was the product of a state eager to loot the natural resources of this region. With the coming of the BJP to power in 2004 in Chhattisgarh, 102 MoUs had been signed by 2005. The Texas Power Generation company had invested, for instance, 5000 crores in Chhattisgarh. In Lohandiguda, Tata Steel had acquired an enormous stretch of forest

lands and so had Jindal in Bansi. Ultimately, it was the question of the very existence of the adivasi community. The experience of the Bailadila mines, which had been started as early as the 1950s, shows it was profiting Japan while continuously hampering adivasi life and culture. This policy of acquiring natural resources is the gravest danger haunting the adivasi communities. Sukhlal interjected:

> Manmohan Singh calls the Maoists as the biggest danger, but the real threat is being faced by the adivasis. That is why people came forward in large numbers and resisted Salwa Judum. In fact people as far as Nagaland and Mizoram protested the deployment of their kith and kin such as in Naga and Mizo battalion/s in this area.

By October 2009, the architects of Salwa Judum had to finally give a public statement annulling it. However, according to the party, Salwa Judum continued, with one important difference, said Sonu. 'The state began mobilizing its repressive resources and another wave of intensification of the assault on the people is now being seen in the form of "operation green hunt".'

In the early phase of Salwa Judum 18,000–20,000 forces were deployed. Today there are more than 2,00,000 security forces against the Maoists. The SPOs of Salwa Judum are now known as Koya Commandos. 'Operation green hunt' is nothing but an extension of Salwa Judum. Such campaigns are not unique to DK. In Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa too there are the Sendra/Shanti Senas.

Sonu continued:

> So from Lalgad to Surjagad, this entire adivasi belt with all its wealth and natural resources, although projected as the Red Corridor, is in reality a mineral corridor. They [the State] feel threatened by the rising people's power in this region, therefore they are launching one offensive after another. Since the failure of Salwa Judum now we see 'operation green hunt'. To conclude, white terror had started in 1990–91 after which we decided to form people's government which was followed by the second white terror in 1997. After this, we gave concrete shape to people's power by consolidating the RPCs. Then came Salwa Judum and since then, we have progressed to area-level organs of state power and through all these years, militarily we have

moved from platoons to companies, and are now moving towards battalion formation.'

But much more important than the augmentation of their guerrilla army was the consolidation of their parallel administration.

Towards RPCs

Sonu explained:

> Initially, between 1980 and 1995, we organized the vast masses in DK into various revolutionary mass organizations. We consolidated them with the basic revolutionary understanding that only an organized mass can win the revolution and we continuously went on increasing their active [militant] participation in the revolutionary movement. All the mass struggles we took up to increase the active participation [role] of the masses in the revolutionary movement had helped this process immensely. We have to comprehend the anti-state struggles, anti-feudal [adivasi] struggles, anti-comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie struggles waged here as part of this effort. The struggles for tilling rights of forest lands, the seizure of lands from landlords who had unjustly seized the lands of the oppressed peasantry, the struggles for increase of wage rates, for drought relief measures, mass struggles against state violence, the people's courts against the oppressive measures of the adivasi clan traditions, the various struggles of the people demanding basic facilities from the exploitative government—all these had helped a lot in increasing the revolutionary consciousness of the people. All these struggles took place under the leadership of the revolutionary mass organizations. As a result, these organizations had earned enormous respect, faith and affection of the people. The yearning among them to protect them and the determination to do any work assigned by them has increased a lot. A feeling developed among the vast peasant masses that they cannot live with dignity if not for these organizations. Gradually, in the rural areas the revolutionary mass organizations began to hold sway. The exploitative state which till then had been ruling the villages—persons like Aheri King who represented it locally, his representatives, the clan chiefs, patels, patwaris, sarpanches, *sachiv*s—became ineffective gradually. The people talked of this in their own language and felt at heart that this was the formation of a

sarkar. But we had reviewed in 1995 that the party had delayed a lot in recognizing this and in giving it an appropriate form and slogan.

In DK, the gram committees began to be formed in 1996. If we divide the period between 1996 and 2009 into four parts, it would be easier to understand our practice in this period. First part: 1996–2001; second part: 2001–04; third part: 2005–06; fourth part would be the period from 2007 to the present. By dividing so, it would be easier to understand the changes which had taken place in the form of leaps in these periods.

We changed the name of gram committees which began to be formed in 1996 to gram rajya committees (village state committees) within a short period. We built gram rajya committees in many villages mainly in south and west Bastar. We formed sub-committees to take up various tasks as part of the gram rajya committees. The gram rajya committees were formed under the leadership of the party. They were formed on the basis of the slogan 'All powers to the gram committees'. These initial gram rajya committees took up mainly revolutionary land reforms. The gram rajya committees mainly concentrated on constructing irrigation facilities in order to develop the agriculture of the adivasis. They encouraged fishery as an auxiliary to this. They also encouraged people to raise fruit orchards. While these were aimed at bringing change in the production system of the people, development of education and health sectors immediately came to the fore in the agenda of the gram rajya committees. Special attention had to be paid to provide health and education to the oppressed adivasi people who were denied these facilities for many generations. As part of it, attention was paid to open new schools, to try to run the schools of the exploitative government properly, to accumulate necessary medicines for people's health care and also to train peasant youth as people's doctors. In order to introduce the necessary changes in adivasi agriculture and to fulfil the medical needs of the people, the party made efforts to send some experts in these fields (agricultural workers and degree-holding doctors) from outside.

In 2001, at the ninth party congress of CPI (ML) PW a conceptual development was reached in the party about base areas and building the people's army. After a 'thorough review', the decision was taken to build guerrilla bases. In the words of Sonu:

To develop Dandakaranya into a base area, firstly guerrilla bases were chosen in the DK guerrilla zone. They were chosen keeping in view the geographical area and mass base. Geographically the whole of DK is no doubt a strategic area, but we had chosen areas with relatively more favourable terrain and also taken into consideration the mass base and decided on two or three guerrilla bases in order of priority in the vast forest areas in all divisions keeping in view the favourable and unfavourable conditions there. We chose as guerrilla bases those which have sufficient area for the deployment of our local armed forces and for the activities of our party structures. Though we felt that an area of 50x50 kilometres would be necessary for a guerrilla base, we did not implement it mechanically and made the necessary changes in it according to the specifications of those areas.

Considering the composition of the adivasi villages and least population in the villages, we felt that by electing a local JS for a population of 500–3000 people, there would be good chance of their functioning as governments at that level. As a result, all the old gram rajya committees were restructured and now in each guerrilla base twenty–thirty Janatam Sarkars came into existence. Due to this we got more clarity regarding guerrilla bases. We got clarity regarding the area of the guerrilla base, level of the party committee (area committee) working there, the structure of the people's army military force to be deployed there, the extent of the local government villages, the population in that extent, etc., and with this clarity the JS started to come into existence. When there were structures of gram rajya committees, they were mainly confined to south and west Bastar. But the JS formed all over Dandakaranya since 2001 began to be formed in the chosen guerrilla bases. Even in their formation, efforts to maintain order of priority began. Forces were allotted in accordance. Through practice we got more clarity on the facts that a guerrilla zone is an area where opposite forces fight for power and that guerrilla bases formed in guerrilla zones are areas where power of the revolutionary forces— people—is established in an embryonic form. Gram rajya committees had changed into the Janatam Sarkar and the sub-committees changed into s*hakha* (branch) committees.

Accordingly within the guerrilla zones, guerrilla bases began to be built. Therefore, concrete shape was now finally being given to the construction of people's power in accordance with the terrain and available support of mass base. 500 to 3000 people in the villages were now being constituted into RPCs. The understanding was that

> without an army people cannot build their own power. People's army and people's power were linked. This developed understanding helped us a lot in working towards both the development of the army and the development of people's power. Two or three spots were selected for guerrilla bases in each division, and in this shape ten to twelve spots were concentrated upon to form the guerrilla bases. Maad forms the central guerrilla base.

The difference between a guerrilla zone and a guerrilla base is not semantic. It is, Maoists claim, of substance. A guerrilla zone is a fluid area in the sense that there is contention for control and the State is not entirely absent, even if it be in the shape of its police or armed force. However, there are areas in these zones demarcated to ensure that some work can carry on relatively uninterrupted. These are 'bases' not easily penetrable or accessible. It is here that the RPCs function and one can see the liberated zone in its embryonic form.

The first step was to create a village-level RPC which comprised up to fifteen villages. The second step was to create an Area Revolutionary People's Committee over the selected guerrilla bases in each division comprising 3–5 RPCs. Thus by December 2004, the first ARPC was built. And by February 2005, the second ARPC was formed. From 2005 to 2008 all the spots were covered by ARPCs. The party decision was to create a minimum of three ARPCs in each division, which is currently under process. The first division government was formed in March 2007. During the initial stage of guerrilla bases, the corresponding military formation were platoons. Now with the development of division sarkar, companies were formed at military level. To intensify this process, they have made znal level sarkar preparatory committee. Once this is made, the zonal level sarkar will be in place. Alongside, in terms of military development, battalions are being built. The first battalion was formed on 10 August 2009.

At the village level, for the JS, there is adult franchise. After that at higher levels, there is selection. This means that elected RPCs select members to ARPCs. The same process goes up to the zonal level council. Considering that the DK area was predominantly

inhabited by adivasi people with limited experience in new governance, the first workshop for this purpose was organized in February 2008. According to Sonu it was an extremely productive endeavour as a free exchange of experience and opinion took place for both the party as well as the people. On the other side, as the higher level of people's government was being formed the call for boycott of parliamentary election was now being actively undertaken. In the November 2008 Chhattisgarh Assembly election, as in the April 2009 fifteenth Lok Sabha election and in the October 2009 Maharashtra Assembly election, it was the JS which took the initiative of active and collective boycott of elections by the people. All the RPCs called public meetings in their villages and told the people that they have been electing their own government, how can they elect another government outside of themselves at the same time?

In April 2007, the first division-level JS was formed in DK. The election of the division JS is done through the representative council. All area-level JS members, delegates from the PLGA main and secondary forces, delegates from the division mass organization, executive committee members and delegates from the student, employee, intellectual and semi-proletariat sections participate in the council and elect the division government—the division JS committee. Soon after the election of the first government, the second division government was formed. During this process, in all the divisions, efforts were intensified to increase the area-level JS structures from one to three. As a result, at present, the basis has been established to form division governments in some more divisions in DK.

Alongside this, the People's Militia has also evolved with the purpose of protecting the people's government. The military strength has also been increasing and consequently the paramilitary forces which during every election try to pressurize and threaten the masses, according to the party, have been effectively resisted by the PLGA and the militia lately. In the entire struggle area or the guerrilla zone there has only been 2–5 per cent polling in state Assembly or parliamentary elections. For instance, in Gogonda, there were 700

voters and 1000 paramilitary posted during the election. Despite elaborate arrangements there were only ten votes cast, that too after the third round of re-polling.

In terms of recruitment too, the PLGA has been holding a campaign since 2001. The difference is that after 2005, the duty of recruitment has been handed over to the RPCs. Now the responsibility for the people's army rests with the people's government, the JS. RPCs encourage people to join the people's army. We were told, for instance, that in December 2008, in Gangalur, the ARPCs of the area conducted two public meetings at two different places attended by more than 10,000 people. From the dais itself, the ARPC president gave a call for recruitment into the PLGA. From these two public meetings 107 youth volunteered to join the PLGA. The party, after screening, recruited sixty-five.

All developments in this region of DK are now the responsibility of the people's government, i.e., the JS. The established administration is being replaced by the strengthening of the people's government. The RPCs originally had seven departments. Later two more in the form of trade and industry and public relations have been added. In order to ensure women's participation in people's government, the goal is to secure 50 per cent share for women in governance. When asked if this goal has been met, we were told that they are still working in this area and that as of now there has not been much progress possible. So what is the percentage of women in responsible posts in the JS? It was said that it is around 40 per cent. One of the problems being encountered is that unlike the party or the PLGA which is full-time work and involves travelling, the JS means a more sedentary job and families and household chores remain. Unless there is sharing of these chores women find it difficult to take on administrative responsibilities. The workload too has increased for the JS. For instance, they run mobile schools and mobile health care units.

What was interesting was to get to know how the JS was trying to get around the problem of lack of hospitals and trained doctors. Doctors working in DK's guerrilla zones conduct workshops where elementary training is provided to members of RPCs. Since malaria,

cholera and elephantiasis are the three most dreaded illnesses afflicting people, their symptoms are taught and medicines identified by their colours, in order that some treatment is offered to people who are unwell. What if these ‘barefoot’ doctors mix up medicines? Well, there is no 100 per cent guarantee that this does not occur. But all we can ensure is that incidents of this nature are minimized through workshops or by sending a team of doctors at a time.

In so far as mobile schools are concerned these are in the nature of camps where children attend schools for anywhere between fifteen and thirty days, depending upon how tense the situation is in a particular area. Classes last for ninety minutes for each subject with four subjects taught in a day. There are between twenty-five to thirty students and three teachers. They have begun to employ certain teaching aids— from globes and torchlights to CDs—to teach history and science. In science they find that they encounter problems because people’s beliefs about evolution, the universe, the sun and the moon, etc., are different from what science teaches us. But children are taught through teaching aids or CDs about the way life evolved, eclipses occur, etc. Significantly, JS education tries to meet the challenge posed to them to teach, for example, modern science by picking up everyday things around them and maximizing the use of resources they have access to. I was reminded of the work carried out by Kishore Bharati, an NGO in MP which did a lot of work in the area of pedagogy and experimented with science kits and other tools to make education accessible and engaging for children as well as adults.

How It Works

It is one thing to create a political structure but quite another to find out how it actually operates. I was told that elections to RPCs are held every three years. Those RPCs select members for ARPCs. I also knew that on an average up to fifteen RPCs constitute an ARPC. The RPC holds a general body meeting where accounts are shared and reviewed. Similarly the ARPC accounts are discussed in extended meetings of all the RPCs which come under it. In both the RPC and the ARPC members have the right to recall any office-bearer if he or she is found wanting in any respect. But I wanted to know what an ARPC budget looked like. The area where we were had fourteen RPCs. Each RPC had roughly 160 households. Thus in the ARPC there were approximately 3000-plus households. There were fifteen members in the ARPC. Niti, a woman comrade, was the division committee member in charge of the Janatam Sarkar. Shivnath was the president of the ARPC and Balmati its vice president. The head of the finance department was Naresh, while Sushila was the head of the PR department and a member of the party area committee. Each ARPC has a standing committee where the president, the vice-president, the finance department head as well as the defence department head are members. I asked to see the budget for 2009. This is what it looked like.

On the income side it showed Rs 10,01,000. This was made up of Rs 3,60,000 tax on contractors; Rs 5,00,000 allotted by the Jantam Sarkar; and Rs 2,50,000 collected through work days or *shram daan* by the area households. On the expenditure side the budget showed that they spent Rs 5,06,935 towards defence; Rs 1,40,250 for agriculture; Rs 1,00,000 for health; Rs 10,000 for education; Rs 60,000 for trade; and Rs 5000 for public relations. Why was the

expenditure on defence high and education a pittance, I asked? Niti explained that since 2004 when a decision was taken to shift the responsibility for the PLGA and People's Militia to the JS the expenditure incurred for the kit (three pairs of uniform, oil, soap, toothpaste, washing soap, comb, gunpowder, bows and arrows, and food) was borne by the ARPC. As for low expenditure on education Shivnath said that it was only because they had not been able to find a 'guruji' for the schools run by the JS. As party cadres filled the role they did not have to spend money on paying salaries or more than what was needed to run the evening schools. I asked them if I could be shown details of how the money was spent on agriculture. The expenditure comprised money spent on fishery, plants, seeds, papaya, lemon, mango and guava. Some were items purchased from individual farmers and distributed among those who needed it. However, fishery, and seeds and plants were meant for the development of pisciculture (this ARPC had four ponds for fishery and seven wells) and providing seeds to poor peasants who could not afford to buy them or for some reason needed help. Similarly trade was to purchase forest products for resale. The ARPC has a justice department also.

What cases are generally referred to them? Many cases relate to land disputes, say, between family members, especially between brothers. The past practice was that the elder brother got a larger share than the younger ones. Also women got less than men. But not any more because RPCs go by the principle of equality. Which means land, for instance, gets equally divided between all claimants. I asked them to share details of cases handled by the RPC.

One of the most difficult cases was the murder of three traders from L who had gone to T to purchase goats. They had between them Rs 20,000. First a missing person's case was referred to the local police station. When they failed to register an FIR, the family of the missing traders approached the RPC. After three months of searching for them their remains were found. Now began the search for the culprits. The justice department after investigation discovered that they were robbed and killed and the story spread that wild animals probably had got them. Those who had spread the story

were the first suspects and when they were confronted they confessed to the crime. The people accused of the crime were brought before a People's Court where 1500 people came along with 115 from the victim's family. The victim's family wanted to kill the accused. After much deliberation they settled for sixty bullocks, forty goats, fifteen pigs, twenty chickens, ten *kandi* of rice (each kandi equals 30 kg). However, finally the matter was settled by making the accused pay Rs 80,000, the bones of the dead were handed over to the family of the victims and proper burial undertaken. I asked why such leniency was shown to the accused. I was told that Rs 80,000 was a huge amount in the forest area and that even this amount was in inverse proportion to the class of the peasants. Thus the rich peasant had to pay Rs 20,000, middle 15,000 and poor 10,000. Besides, they said that the JS Constitution, called 'Policy Program of Revolutionary People's Committees', does not espouse death-for-death, as a matter of principle.

Article 5(h) says that

> [t]he people's courts will work as per the principles of just judiciary process and system on the basis of class line and mass line. The judicial department will solve the problems between the people so as to enhance their integrity. Normally it does not punish to solve them. When it tries landlords, hierarchs, heads of the ruling class parties, wicked government officers, police, paramilitary, military forces, police agents, conspirators, disrupters, deceivers, goons, thieves, anarchists and other such elements, it isolates them from the people and punishes them accordingly including confiscation of their properties. It follows methods to increase the role of people in avoiding crimes. It gives death sentence to those who indulge in counter-revolutionary crimes. Before it implements death sentence the local people's government have to obtain permission from the higher courts. Except for counter-revolutionary crimes, it will send those indulging in murder, attempt to murder, atrocities on women, informing the exploiting police and other such things to the labour camps. In these camps, they are made to do labour. They are taught revolutionary politics and are reformed. It will help to develop the people's judicial system by passing verdict on disputes, crimes and conspiracies. It will also keep in view the customary traditions while giving verdict.

And 5(i) says that

> [i]n each and every case there must be voting among the judges and verdict must be given according to the opinion of the majority. It may be given with slight majority also. But in critical cases the verdicts must have 2/3rd majorities. The president of the judicial departmental committee or the judge who presides over the trial shall announce the verdicts. They must give the necessary explanation.

Thus I was told the Maoists do not kill at the drop of a hat; in actual fact capital punishment is reserved only for ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’. What is meant by ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’? From what I gathered it is when a heinous crime is committed, such as enabling security forces to carry out an ambush that results in the loss of lives, which can invite capital punishment. It is not awarded for every informer or even homicide. I was repeatedly told that the death penalty is rare and is preceded by several warnings to the person. Even then, at least what the Constitution obliges them to do, is not carried out unless it is ratified by the higher levels, going all the way up to the state or the zonal JS. This is to ensure that there is some check and balance against abuse of authority or summary executions.

Women: Against Superstition, Patriarchy and the State

Together with land was tied the issue of women's emancipation. Women did not get any share of landed property nor after marriage could they freely participate in ceremonies or rituals. They could not move from one village to another, during menstruation and were forced to remain outside the village, and their attendance in meetings was discouraged. A woman has to get tattooed, cannot wear blouses or saris, cannot eat eggs—and follow other dos and don'ts—all in the name of tradition. The emergence of Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan meant that these issues began to be challenged and demands began to be raised. It was KAMS which raised the issue of Ghotul and began a debate to end what had become a system where women serviced men. It took six years of relentless propaganda to end the licence young adults had to consort with women of their choice and where tribal chiefs or rich peasants (*dhani kisan*) among tribals, as well as, later, the forest department and police personnel, exploited young tribal women. The point was that the party did not go and decree anything. What they did was that they backed debate and propagated their views and over a period of time brought about the acceptance of the reforms being envisaged. So it's not as though Ghotul has disappeared; it has been transformed.

An appeal issued by KAMS in October 2009 draws attention to what women went through:

> KAMS is working for three decades in DK with the aim of liberating women. It mobilized and led women in the struggles against forest officers, paper mill managements, tendu leaf contractors and the exploitation, sexual harassment, atrocities and violence of traders

from plains. It gave a helping hand to young women who stood against the tribal patriarchy oppressing them. It gave a call to the adivasi women to rise under the leadership of KAMS and fight for women's liberation. It gave solid support to the fraternal organization, DAKMS. It mobilized women to resist the police who came to attack their villages and chased them away.

The feudal representatives like Kalma Masalu (Mahendra Karma) who could not tolerate KAMS, which had challenged their tribal feudal authority and patriarchy, tried to crush it under their feet in the name of Jan Jagaran. Women had resisted and withstood the two Jan Jagaran campaigns of 1990 and 1997. From June 2005, Jan Jagaran changed its face. In the name of Salwa Judum it is hounding and killing us like a man-eater. It turned us into homeless people in Dantewada, Bastar and Bijapur. Home, field, hut, paths, trees, shrubs —no place was safe for us. The Judum goons pounced on us like hungry wolves and bled us literally. The Naga, Mizo and CRPF forces cut our bodies into pieces. The fact that one or more women were raped in almost all the families shows the scale of the sexual violence perpetrated on us. Our bodies were cut, our breasts were cut, our private parts were pierced with sharp weapons and the wombs of pregnant women were cut open with bayonets. As if this was not enough now the State is readying itself for a massive offensive against us.

A question often posed is what does the party do when there is a conflict between autonomous identity and traditions which, in particular, exploit women? From what Sonu said it seems it is a delicate issue and handled carefully. For instance, when women first demanded that their being forced to be outside a village during menstruation should be discontinued and that women should not have to leave the village, the party supported them. But when KAMS asked women to defy tradition there was much anger in the villages. KAMS then publicly admitted its mistake and gave an apology. On the other hand when the Ghotul issue figured and thousands of women came out in protest and questioned the tradition by pointing out that outside influence has distorted 'pure' traditions, the party began debate and discussions. In other words the approach appears to be not to impose reform but, through debate and discussion, to introduce reforms. This ability not to shy away from reforms of

traditions even as they encourage tribal identity struggles shows how and why the party is respected in these parts.

If women comprise by far the most articulate members of the movement and their number has grown, it is less than 50 per cent, which the party itself mandates, and remains around 40–45 per cent. But it is remarkable that one sees young women as commanders of platoons and leading cadres of the JS. However, not all the problems encountered by women have been addressed, not all demands raised by them met. As women cadres themselves say, while much needed to be done the difference is that they are encouraged to raise issues, to take on responsibilities. One of the issues, for example, is that the JS Constitution mandates the agriculture department under its Article 3c to 'release joint patta (land deed) in the name of families and in the name of both wife and husband'. This met with opposition from men but the party is pushing it through. In any case anyone who travels inside the JS areas cannot fail to observe the prominent role of women in the movement. All my conversations were not only with the men but included women. In many ways, enlightened cosmopolitanism is what one encountered in the JS area where issues of gender discrimination and patriarchy were openly expressed and challenged. Whereas in the 'civilized' world not only do the *bhagat*s of modern era feel no embarrassment in eulogizing mass murderers and shielding rapists but a cacophony of sexist advertisements, fashion shows and films drown the voices of the enlightened minority.

As a digression, when I was in Abujmaad one of the soldiers asked me, 'Do you see that field in front, dada?' Yes, I said, what about it. 'This land was cleared by us and we built the boundary wall and then asked the villagers to cultivate it as a collective farm. It's good for *dhaan* (paddy). But the villagers were scared and they said that the land belonged to the deva and that if they cultivate it they will be cursed and could fall ill. So the PLGA platoon decided to till the field. Having done it they hope that the villagers will see that nothing bad has happened to us and that they sow paddy next time.' Similarly, Niti, a party representative in an area RPC, said that very often when people fall ill they say they will go to the *ojha* for a cure.

‘We do not stop them. We tell them, go to the ojha but please take your tablet too. And they do; if they then believe that they have become better owing to the ojha that’s fine with us, so long as we can help them with medicine because we know it is that which will cure them.’

There were many issues which needed to be probed, such as the question of love marriage within the same endogamous group, since we were told that the party backed such couples, which went against tribal customs. It was also important to know whether household chores were being shared between men and women. I also wanted to find out whether, if both wife and husband were party members, the husband helped with the household chores in case the wife had to attend meetings or attend to party work. However, I had to choose between this and to travel to Abujmaad and see the developments being carried out there. I chose the latter.

War as a Metaphor for the Mobilization of People

While Maoists consider People's War an intrinsic part of their politics, it was only in the course of discussion that clarity over what they meant by 'politics' emerged. Our conversation had veered towards some of the spectacular actions undertaken by them. While discussing the looting of the armoury in Nayagarh in the state of Orissa, the GS said that military action was only one part of the operation. It was preceded by eight to nine months of political work in the area concerned. It was therefore called 'operation ropeway', meaning the party's leap from Rayagada into areas beyond and close to the state capital Bhubaneswar. For months party members entered Nayagarh and worked among the people taking some of them into confidence and establishing themselves. More than military activity, i.e., looting of the armoury, it is this political mobilization which was successful. Militarily, as I found out, the action was considered less successful.

For one, the reconnaissance by the cadres underestimated the number of weapons in the Nayagarh armoury. They expected no more than 400–500 weapons and 30,000–40,000 rounds of ammunition as against 1200 weapons and more than 1,00,000 rounds which were actually there. As a result the force prepared to carry out the raid was smaller than what the armoury raid needed. Also the action was to have taken place in the night and the guerrillas ought to have escaped unseen. Instead the operation began late and was completed in the early hours of the morning by when the inhabitants of Nayagarh had gathered outside and seen the retreating guerrillas and the direction in which they went. They could only carry 300-odd weapons and 50,000 rounds of ammunition. If the action was still considered a success it was

because of the political mobilization achieved whereby Maoists expanded into a new area and the overall audacity displayed by them. The point is to emphasize that every military action is seen as an enabling expansion of the political reach of the party. But having expanded they have to consolidate and sustain their mobilization of people. Thus People's War cannot be separated from non-military activities and efforts designed to promote self-reliance.

When I visited Bastar I was told that the JS had begun to experiment with cooperative farming. This is a step in the direction of strengthening what is called 'people's economy'. People's War is not just military actions or operations alone. It is essentially—80 per cent of it—nonmilitary work where PLGA soldiers engage in productive work. Maoists also consider production by organized militia or collection of forest produce by the militia as part of its tactical counter-offensive campaign (TCOC) to meet the personal expenses of the members as well as the needs of war. Thus engaging in production activities is an intrinsic part of People's War. This has to be understood or else we can erroneously conflate it with militarization by the State.

As explained above People's War also means mobilizing people and resources as well as taking up welfare activities like education, providing medical facilities, distributing foodgrain and clothes to people facing repression and affected by famine. Without these activities military action would cease to carry much weight or be able to sustain popular support. The JS distributed seeds and extends credit to farmers and even in the midst of severe repression carried out land reform. I recall reading in the *People's March* supplement of July 2007 how in Bhairamgarh block of Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh, one of the main centres of Salwa Judum terror, 768 acres of land of adivasi and non-adivasi landlords were seized and distributed by the JS. These villages were Takilode, Satva, Dharma, Belnar, Poosal, Neerum, Pidiakot, Pollevaya, Palla, Kodanka, Parkeli, Markapal, Oorsapara and Oothia. Thus the quiet confidence displayed by the party that people are with them stems from the fact that those whose lives have been transformed, thanks to the reforms carried out by the JS, will stay, get organized and offer resistance.

This is substantiated by the fact that in the villages of the Bastar region five years of depredation by Salwa Judum has not weakened but strengthened the Maoist movement. In this context their continuous engagement to improve ‘people’s economy’ saw them introducing cooperative farms in DK which are a notch higher than land distribution, work teams, etc., in terms of development.

I wanted to see these farms and since Abujmaad was where they were first introduced, that’s where I went.

Abujmaad

Abujmaad is considered one of the main guerrilla bases of the movement. A guerrilla base, as explained earlier, is a more secure area for the movement, where security forces find it difficult to penetrate. Presumably because of this the Indian Army has now been permitted by the Cabinet committee on security of Government of India to acquire 500 square kilometres of forest land to set up a battle manoeuvre range and training centre. It is reported that this camp will provide training in jungle warfare to a brigade-size force. The state government of Chhattisgarh has provided this land right at the edge of Abujmaad Forest for this purpose: a clear sign that the war against the Maoists is being stepped up.

This was to be the most exciting, rather dangerous, part of my travel. The trek itself was going to be long; there were parts where we had to travel in the night and where one could not use torches, as these could be seen from a distance and certainly by government forces deployed nearby. I was also asked to stay close to the platoon and not stray. There could be booby traps. What if I slip and fall into a booby trap? My companions laughed and said, ‘Just stay close to us.’ Easier said than done, I told myself.

Parenthetically, it is worth remembering what a daily newspaper quoted the director general of police, Chhattisgarh, as saying: ‘Without taking out landmines it is literally impossible to go after them (Maoists) freely in thickly forested areas where Maoists are always ready with booby traps’.

‘Vast stretches of forest areas of Chhattisgarh, particularly in Bastar region, have been heavily mined by the CPI (Maoist). Nearly 25,000 sq km of the total 40,000 sq km of forest area in Bastar region have been implanted with IED. This is posing the biggest

challenge for the security forces to move into the area to fight the Naxals.'[52]

Even outside the forest areas on major roads, intelligence sources were cited by the *Tribune* and *Hindustan Times* the same day (10 May 2010) as saying 'IEDs have been planted when the road was constructed or re-carpeted by contractors. Many (IEDs) were buried more than three–four feet below the asphalt road and existing minesweepers and sniffer dogs can not detect a landmine buried deep.'

While booby traps were probably everywhere, and this is something guerrillas may have learned from the tribals who use different traps for capturing or hunting a variety of wild animals, the extent of IEDs laid in the forest area is highly exaggerated; it is more likely that they are planted on highways and major road arteries.

But to return to my story . . . We ate dinner and waited for the signal as darkness spread around us. It was cold and I felt myself shivering. Was it the cold or fear? Nights do get cold here in Bastar, at times icy cold. But this wasn't just the cold. The platoon commander blew the whistle. We stood in a file and called out our number. Advance parties were sent ahead and our night trek began. There was no problem while we walked through fields but as we went deeper into the forest, darkness enveloped us and it became difficult for me to keep pace with others, who walked as though this was a mere stroll. Every time we came out of the forest into an open area I sighed in relief only to realize that this was even tougher because I had to walk on a narrow dyke and found myself tripping every now and then. The worst was yet to come. S took my hand and asked if he should walk close to me; my pride got the better of me and I said, no, I will manage. The hill climb began. Up and down, up and down we walked, over small and medium-sized hills, until the real climb began. This is where I slipped, fell, broke my shoes and cursed myself for not being better prepared. My eyesight being weak, my night vision is even worse. It was impossible to know where a rock protruded and where it was loose. But somehow I managed and we reached a spot where we were safe and we could

camp for the night. Exhausted I lay down and slept. Woken up at 5, I was told we had to start. It was dark when we began. Very soon morning rays dispersed the night and below me as far as the eye could see were hills and forest. Such greenery as far as one's eyes could see! It looked deceptive looking down from above, as though a velvety green carpet was there below. As we neared the thick evergreen trees and the thick undergrowth I saw they hid rocky terrain. Climbing down we neared a rainwater stream. Tiredness vanished and I was spellbound by the unspoilt forest. Except for us there was not a soul in sight, barring birds whose melodious chirping kept us company. Everyone appeared to be in a jovial mood. S told me another hour and a half and we would come to the first village where we could halt. While I was hungry by now, it did not matter. I could wait because the countryside I was travelling through was stunning. I forgot I was with the guerrillas and that there was war all around us. In the distance one could see a clearing and smoke rising. I was now in Abujmaad and this would be one of the many villages I would see as I walked deeper into this forest, home of the Muria tribe. From here it was another few hours to where we were to camp and I could go and see the cooperative farms run by RPCs.

The villagers knew the guerrillas and they were used to seeing strangers, although such visits by outsiders were infrequent. I shook hands with the old and the young, the men and the women. The Ghotul, or the community hall (open on all sides with a roof above), was a good place to sit. Tea was prepared and as I sat I saw Sukhlal come with a bowl of gruel made from wheat and offer it to me. I was hungry and I lapped it up. I was offered a banana and I ate that too. I was good and ready to march; I wanted to see more.

After crossing the village we made our way up the hill, and it surprised me that while it was one thing to start the climb or walk downhill, there were no paths visible to the naked eye. Yet through the thick foliage suddenly a path emerged. I was told a stranger can easily get lost and chances of encountering a bear are rather high. I asked one of my companions, are you trying to scare me? He said, 'No, comrade.' He pointed to the ground by the side of the path we were walking on. 'Do you see these dug-out holes? This is fresh as

you can see and this is a root which bears love to eat. These forests are known for bears and tigers. Of course over the years their numbers have come down or they have been pushed further into the forest. We have lost many comrades to them. But here in Abujmaad they are a fairly common sight.'

The forest gave way to a clearing where I saw half-finished houses and piles of logs lying. On going closer, it appeared that these houses had been damaged. I asked, what happened here, why were these houses vacated? I was told that the party had tried to rehabilitate some of the displaced persons from Dantewada to settle them here. About 100- odd persons came, but they did not like it here. So they were then moved back to the other side of River Indrawati to their villages from where Salwa Judum goons had driven them away.

The sun had risen high by now and I was hoping we would reach the camp soon. We saw another village ahead and some of the platoon members went to borrow utensils from the villagers as we made our way towards a stream about a kilometre away. After three days I wanted to wash myself and my clothes and stretch my limbs. After lunch while others were busy I went to see the first cooperative farm.

I realized then that it was not next to the village but some distance away. Why was this? The selection of the spot was important. Not any patch of land will do. It had to be a spot which fulfilled some criteria such as the quality of soil so irrigating the land would not be a problem or clearing the land would not be too difficult. The farm was properly demarcated and fenced, and row after row of vegetables were planted inside. There was lift irrigation to water the farm. One person could water the farm by lifting water from the stream below by lowering the branch with a bucket or a tin box into the water and then lifting it up slowly, not in a jerk, and as the bucket neared the surface level all that was needed was for the bucket to be tilted so that water would pour out into the mouth of the canal and from there spread to other channels covering the entire farm.

Land which belonged to the RPC was cleared by villagers at the initiative of the RPC. It was cultivated by villagers sparing time to

work on the land and then sharing the harvest. This cooperative farm was an experiment towards collective farming, where land is collectively owned through the RPC. Cultivated by village households, the harvest is shared. This was introduced in the Abujmaad area about two years ago. The first thing which struck me was the sight of green chillies growing in abundance. About 25 per cent of the land, where vegetables were grown, was taken up by chillies. Red and green chillies are consumed in large quantities by every one. But they had also planted saunf (aniseed), onion, brinjal, gourd, lady's fingers, cauliflower, banana, maize, spinach, tomatoes, *lauki*, *kaddu* and bitter gourd. I asked Kumma baba how much labour went into the farm. It took one day to clear the land for which twenty-eight villagers came. From nearly each household in the village one member came to sow the seeds, two members each came to water every eight days. And every day and night two persons took turns to stand watch against wild animals destroying the farm.

Narsimha, another ARPC agricultural expert, showed me a field where paddy was sown. It was an acre and a half. The crop was nearly ready and in a few days, he said, villagers will come to harvest. This he felt would go some way in making themselves self-sufficient and reduce their dependence on haats outside. What is more, in time of need, he said, the JS has to provide food to the people. How is the produce in such farms divided? They follow class lines, with poor peasants getting it first and then others as one goes up. Are the vegetables grown for the villagers' own consumption or for the market? The plan was to sell some of the produce in the haat but with haats shifting to camps this is no longer possible. So maybe even vegetable plots might switch over to grain cultivation.

The register of the agricultural department of the Toke RPC in Abujmaad for 2009 had this:

> Paddy: 87 kandi (Each kandi has 20 *pelli*. Each pelli has 1.5kg; thus each kandi has 30 kg.) or 2610 kg from three acres on which sixty persons worked for two days.
> Pulses: 10 pelli or 15 kg from half an acre. Three ploughs employed for one day.
> *Chavri*: 30 kg as seeds and 100 kg for consumption grown on 70

yards.
Barbati: 26 kg. One plough for one day on half an acre.
Mustard: 150 kg grown on half an acre. Three days' work; number of people not available.
Ganga (oilseed): 138 kg on three acres of land; ten persons.
Sesame: 15 kg on less than half an acre. Two persons ploughed the land.
Pumpkin: 100 kg mixed with kosra grain on three acres.
Kumhra: 300 kg cultivated with kosra grain on three acres.
Tomato: 40 kg.
Cucumber: 200 kg.
Brinjal: 20 kg.
Maize: 870 kg cultivated on the same land as mustard. Entire RPC households employed.
Rahad pulse: 10 kg grown on *medh*.
Spinach: 10 kg.
Sweet potatoes: 15 kg.

Paddy and kosra are stored for use during summer months and for those who are poor.

The Dumnar RPC (Maad) distributed 817.5 kg of paddy to 109 people in ten villages in 2009.

In the same RPC during the monsoon an additional 243 kg of paddy was distributed. They also provided 622.5 kg to the Vedammetta RPC in 2009.

How many such farms are there under the JS? Unfortunately I could not get the exact total. But in the last two years such farms are being promoted in every village and area RPC. Thus they could not be only a few. In Abujmaad each RPC had at least one such cooperative farm, in some cases even more. What I came across were instances of success but surely, I asked, there might be some which failed? The answer was that none of the cooperative farms have failed. But I guess it's only a few years down the line that we will know for sure whether the momentum has been maintained. Anyhow, as a mark of developing food security these farms will play a very important role. It is also significant that some of the party members were discussing the deficiency in the soil in Bastar and the need for ammonia, urea and zinc to improve the soil. Obviously, they

were grappling with issues even in the midst of the gathering storm of war. Or perhaps this was helping them to accelerate the pace of cooperative farm development to meet the likely food shortages.

Collateral Damage

It is here in Abujmaad, the area considered to be a ‘guerrilla base’, that the Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) runs five schools, called Vivekanand Vidya Mandirs. It would take me six hours to walk to and from one of the schools. I was curious to see for myself what could be described as the ‘peaceful cohabitation’ of the secular with the religious. These schools are located in Akabeda, Irrakbhatti, Kachchapal, Kundla and Kutul. They also ran at these places health centres as well as fair price shops. The schools operate, as of now, but fair price shops have been shut and the health centres now provide a skeleton service. A doctor used to visit the health centre every Wednesday but since 2005 this has been discontinued. Because the administration claims that these were being availed of by the Maoists and that the doctor was treating Naxals. I asked whether their RKM seniors, called ‘Maharaj’, have informed the administration that it is not a crime to treat anyone, and that there is a Supreme Court order which says no one can be denied medical help simply because he/she is accused of being an extremist or a terrorist. The reply was that this may be true but there is a distance of several thousand kilometres between the Supreme Court and where they are.

In practical terms it also means that there is an economic blockade, an act of war, imposed in the war zone and thus no supplies, i.e., food rations or medicines can enter, for instance, the interior region of Abujmaad. To ensure that rations and other supplies are controlled, weekly haats earlier held in civilian areas have been shifted to armed camps. This means that entry and exit of civilians are regulated. I was told by a member of the RKM school staff, who feared that he could get into trouble were his name

mentioned, that since September 2008 they require a special pass for travelling, authorized and signed by the superintendent of police, Narayanpur. At the check-post, while exiting, they are obliged to record their names, where they are headed and why. On entry they have to show what supplies they are carrying, whether it is in accordance with the challan (invoice) and then their bags are searched. At the camp where they buy provisions they have to record, as do the villagers, how many members there are and then rations are provided. At the camp they are also vulnerable since it is frequented by the dreaded SPOs at whose mere word any person can be picked up, beaten, thrown into jail and maybe released after paying a bribe. Women are particularly vulnerable. I was told of a recent incident where two milk sellers were picked up at the behest of SPOs and the officer in charge asked them for Rs 2000 as bribe to set them free. They had only Rs 500 between them so as a show of magnanimity the officer of the camp took Rs 500 and let them go with a warning that they better remain 'good citizens' and not believe anything Maoists tell them.

By now villagers had gathered around us. I asked one of them how they got their food rations. He said most of them, pointing to the villagers gathered, have to visit the market to purchase goods they need for daily use, especially salt, edible oil and medicines. But he said they do it reluctantly and not as often as before because of the harassment they are subjected to as well as the reduced rations allowed because the police says that they were taking it for Maoists or Naxalites. They repeated what the RKM staff had told me about harassment. On approaching the camp they say they have to walk in single file through a fenced corridor. Each time, walking in or walking out, they are searched. If any item is found to be in larger than the specified quantity decided by the administration they face questions or the threat of being arrested and having to pay a bribe to escape from that. The RKM personnel said that they have had to get out of their vehicle even when their 'maharaj' is with them. Why don't you complain, I asked. They said they have to be careful. 'If we complain we are told we are talking like Naxalites and are asked to shut up. If we persist we are told they know about our "links with Naxalites" and

that they are keeping an eye on us. Or they warn us not to act too smart. So we prefer to keep our mouths shut.'

I asked the platoon members who had accompanied me if I could speak to the RKM persons freely. They agreed after some hesitation. When they went outside the main gate I asked, 'What about the Naxalites, are they not a problem for the RKM?' I was told that in the initial years there were lots of problems. The party was suspicious of what they were doing. They were also suspicious about a religious organization running schools and concerned probably about religious indoctrination and whether we taught religious scriptures, etc. But over the years we have come to understand each other. I asked, does this mean you accept their diktat and they let you be or is it that they do not feel threatened by your presence any more? One of the people present smiled and said, 'After the initial years when we faced problems from them, they have not bothered us, and it is because educating tribal children is something that forms a common bond between us. They know we are not doing anything other than teaching tribal children, something they really appreciate—in particular because we are teaching them science and language.' I was told that they have had a series of conversations with Maoist leaders to clear doubts which the party might have entertained about their school and its curriculum. 'And we said we know they are keen that tribal children get an education and they know that we are providing just that. So with time problems have disappeared. They have, in fact, even stopped visiting us at our request when we told them that we were accused of being Naxalites by the authorities.' But don't the Maoists ask for help? Such as medicine? No, they said, because they know that their provisions have been slashed and the health centre and fair price shop have been closed. 'So the party has told us that they will not interfere, so long as we do not allow armed police to camp in the school premises.'

In fact, he said that one of the charges levelled against them by the officials is: 'How come RKM schools operate but not the government-run schools.' They inquired from me: 'Have you seen what the government schools are like? Some of them are not fit to be called schools. Just see what they are like and remember the fact

that most of the teachers draw a salary even when they stay away from attending schools.' So, I asked, does it mean that Maoists do not threaten them? He said, 'Look you will get us into trouble, but all that we are saying is that if a person can draw a salary by doing nothing but simply using the excuse that Naxalites threaten him, and the administration finds this useful fodder for their propaganda against Naxalites, claiming they do not allow government schools to function, then what conclusions does one draw?' But one should not blame only the teachers, he said, because some of the schools are only schools in name.

And, I queried further, is it true that in the last four years 385 residential schools have been destroyed by Naxalites in Bastar? He smiled before our conversation came to an end: 'I did not know there were that many schools in Bastar!'

This did not help explain much, but the conversation ended on that enigmatic note. I was reminded of a story that had appeared in the *Indian Express*[53] which cited a member of the Naga Armed Force deployed in Tamar (ST) Constituency during Jharkhand state Assembly elections in 2009. He was quoted as saying the following: 'We had heard that this area was the den of Maoists. We did not see them anywhere. But the schools where we were lodged were full of mosquitoes. There was no potable water. We used to drink water from the hand pump after boiling, but (even) this did not help.' Those who lament the destruction of schools and shed tears over the plight of soldiers having to live in such sub-human conditions should spare a thought for school children who are supposed to be taught in such miserable conditions. If in addition these schools are used as camps for military personnel, wherein lies the responsibility?[54]

When I came out of the Ramakrishna Mission school, I asked my PLGA escorts whether they were upset that I had asked them to leave. They said, 'No. We know why you did it but even if we had been present they would have told you the same thing because we have no problem with them. We are happy that our children are getting an education.' Yes, I do believe that Maoists encourage education.

But returning from there, before evening fell, one could not help thinking about how in a war zone the very act of standing up to a person in authority is considered disobedience, which the authorities do not countenance. And yet, there was much one got to know from the guarded remarks of the RKM personnel! It is certain that the RKM is under tremendous pressure from security forces because they still operate in an area where the writ of the state does not run. If they had faced problems from the Maoists, the schools could not have functioned. However, what was incomprehensible was why is it that those who believe in God were scared of mere mortals holding out threats or trying to pressure them into submission? Were their material possessions, in the shape of properties, making them vulnerable to the government's arm-twisting? That is, if 'serving the people' is their call in service of their God, why is it that the RKM seniors—or for that matter Christian, Hindu and other missionaries—do not protest cutbacks in medicine or closure of fair price shops in war zones? Are they not convinced about the omnipotence of their gods to serve and help those in need?

I Needed Some Answers

Talking about displacement and land grab and the party's role against this inevitably led to posing questions about mining. If minerals need to be exploited and mineral-based industries are needed for progress, then in opposing corporate land grab is the party not opposing industrialization per se?

Precisely because of this, said Raju, we will soon be coming out with our own mining policy.

What will be its salient points? Wait till it is released but one thing is for certain. The low royalty of approximately Rs 10–50 per metric tonne, depending on the quality of iron ore, is too low when the international iron ore price per mt had gone as high as Rs 10,000-plus. He referred to a booklet brought out in Chhattisgarh which highlighted some of the anomalies of the government's lopsided policy which benefits foreign and big corporations. Quoting from it, he said that the National Mineral Development Corporation supplies iron ore to Japan from its Bailadila mines at Rs 400 per mt, whereas local manufacturers have had to buy iron ore at one time for Rs 5800 per mt This was brought down when the trade union Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha-linked Engineering Workers Union impressed on the owners that instead of squeezing money from workers by lowering wages they should be lobbying with the government against the discriminatory policy followed: charging exorbitant prices for iron ore but allowing captive mines at throwaway prices for multinational corporations.

According to Raju, the party was firmly against handing over mining leases to MNCs, that too for the export of minerals rather than for the use of domestic industries. They also believe, he said, that mining should be strictly regulated and restricted.

What about advantages of scales of production, energy saving and restoration of land after excavation? He said that all these issues will be addressed and that our party is not against local industries. I asked him whether mines will be leased out to private parties. If so, what would be the criterion and what guarantee will they have to ensure against exploitation?

For an answer, Raju insisted, I must have patience and wait.

We have no choice but to wait. However, what was significant was the need felt by the party to think in terms of going public with their own version of the mining policy. Moreover, they seem to have deliberated on the matter. Because Raju said that while the party is not opposed to industrialization they are firmly opposed to big industries. Also they believe that forest-based product manufacturing such as amla, bamboo or wood, etc., should be given preference.

Another question was: how does the party meet all its requirements?

A document, 'Our Financial Policy', had this to say:

> There are three resources in the main for fulfilling our economic needs. One is the party membership fee, levy and the contributions of the people and the second one is by confiscating the wealth and the income sources of the enemy and the third is the taxes we collect in the guerrilla zones and base areas by following progressive tax system. At present income through independent production is not an important source of income for us. This is possible only after the establishment of the base areas.
>
> Our sources of income are limited but our areas of operation are expanding. The intensity of the war is increasing and area of movement is expanding. So our needs and expenditure are increasing also. It is natural for the incomes of the different regions to be unequal as there is unequal development of the movement. It is also a fact that our income is not increasing on a par with the growing expenditure. Therefore it is quite necessary for us to strive to achieve balance between income and expenditure.
>
> So, to achieve the above said balance, to fulfill ever increasing needs of the war, political propaganda and to uplift the life standards of the people, it is necessary to improve the economic resources and regulate the expenditure. For this a centralized financial policy and

> planning is quite essential for our party. That means, all the income and expenditure should be planned centrally. This centralized policy and plan should be implemented throughout the party from the higher committee to lower committee according to the committee system.
>
> Though we work in the light of the above centralized general policy, it is difficult for the CC to fulfill all the needs of conducting revolutionary war in a vast country like India. Moreover even when seen from the angle of protracted people's war, making the areas self-sufficient is also of prime importance. While implementing the centralized financial policy we have to keep in mind the above said important factor also. Therefore by making our areas of struggle self-sufficient on the one hand and proper implementation of the centralized policy on the other we can fulfill the need of war efficiently. For this the State and Zonal committees should have to play a crucial role in planning, procurement of funds and regulation of expenditures.

This was the party's policy, but what is their revenue income? Is it Rs 1400 crore or more as the government claims? Raju laughed saying that if they had so much they would be able to do a lot more. In fact if there was social peace and they were able to carry out their various programmes they may be able to reach that revenue figure. Most of the money is collected in the form of 'royalty' on tendu patta, bamboo, tamarind and other forest produce. Revenue accruing from the looting of banks or the confiscation of wealth is far less. Yes, they do tax some of the companies or contractors which operate in what they describe as the guerrilla zone. Officials call this extortion; the party calls it tax. It is really of no consequence, except that their sources are indigenous and not external, which even the government is forced to concede. In this sense it is in the time-honoured tradition of patriotic revolutionaries. Far more significantly, the main cost of fighting a war is the cost of the arsenal. The bulk of weapons and ammunition come from looting security forces, armoury or personnel. *No* wages are paid to PLGA soldiers.

It is also worth recalling that thirty years of the party's intervention has brought about a sea change in wage rates as evident from a significant hike in the price of picking or cutting tendu leaf, bamboo, tamarind, etc. So what is the levy? I was told that it was closer to 2 per cent. Thus the levy charged by the party from adivasis is not

exorbitant or a burden. There is some anecdotal reference made also to how much revenue was generated from fish cultivation. In south Dantewada it was said that an RPC earned Rs 5 lakh in income from fish cultivation. This could mean that other RPCs too must be earning revenue income? In the ARPC I was in, their fish income was less than Rs 1 lakh. It would appear, however, that independent generation of income was unevenly distributed across DK but there was certainly some generation. It could also depend on access to markets. Because of the war situation and restriction on entry and exit it is likely that many of the goods which otherwise could have been sold in haats and generated income were being consumed internally. This must impact RPC and ARPC income.

It was said that the JS is contemplating setting up a paper plant to meet its needs, since purchasing and transporting paper has become a problem. Bamboo is in abundance in the area and so is water. They can do without bleach or at least keep its use to a bare minimum; the only hurdle is power generation. If they are able to ensure generation of power or generate power through micro hydro projects, which are not too difficult to install—and with technology or rather technical expertise readily available inside—they might be able to overcome even this problem. The ingenuity, enterprise and ambitions of the JS are quite remarkable.

A Hurried and Much Too Short a Meeting

While returning from Abujmaad we met Comrade Lenj, in charge of Chetna Natya Manch (CNM) in DK, along with Chandru, a leading member of CNM. Some years ago *People's March* had carried an interview with Comrade Lenj. There is a range of activities in which they are engaged. He said that time was short and he had to travel a long way from where we were before dusk fell. So what changes have taken place since the interview appeared in *People's March*?[55] He said for one their membership has since grown to 10,000-plus members. One of the major tasks they were engaged in currently was to write a history of the thirty years of their party's cultural work in DK. Their work involves literature, the plastic arts, music and dance. Their members have composed 204 songs in the last two years. *Jhankar*, the organ of CNM, carries stories written by their own members. They use the form of street theatre to stage plays. What about the themes of their songs? It is propaganda, such as satire or parody (they had used a popular Hindi song from *Bunty Aur Babli* as a parody of Mahendra Karma. They said that they use film tunes selectively and that too only for parody), philosophy to teach dialectical materialism, political campaigns against Salwa Judum, etc. They use traditional instruments as well as others and are even trying to use the *kikirh* which they said was like an early version of the violin. They produce their own music cassettes and have a mobile editing unit. But he said that much of what he said in the interview still remains valid. The following extracts are relevant:

> We impart training to all members of CNM. Children from the age of 10 years to elders are members of CNM. We invite them to special camps according to their activities and enthusiasm. We are trying to teach marching songs, songs with simple words to increase scientific

thinking and dances to children. We are concentrating more on young men and women. We are facing severe police repression in giving training. Especially it is a big problem to give training in places like Gadchiroli (Maharashtra).

We go to the villages and mobilize the CNM members. We fix a schedule of 4, 5 days or two days according to . . . agriculture works, wage earning or collection of forest produce works. We participate in production work along with them and give them training. We don't teach them many songs, dances, steps or instruments at one go. We teach one song or a dance or an instrument one at a time. We give training by keeping in view their talents, interests and learning capacity. This is giving good results. Sometimes we are teaching them to write songs also as part of training. For example we held a five day training camp in South Bastar in 2002. We concentrated on encouraging them to write. The people here are experts in singing songs extempore.

The instruments of DK are very ancient. There are 18 kinds of them. Only a few are in use now. We are using these instruments and also some modern ones. The importance of instruments cannot be underestimated. We did not put any restrictions that only the local instruments should be used. We are using a combination of various instruments. Music should not dominate the song and its lyrics. So we are using modern and local instruments according to the needs of the performance and in a way that it is enhanced. The main ones are the 'Dappi' (a percussion instrument) and the 'Melam' (a wind instrument).

Jhankar (the CNM periodical) was started in July–August 1994 . . . Comrades write in Gondi, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Telugu in this magazine, this is another special feature of *Jhankar*. They can write in whatever language they feel they can express (themselves). There are adivasis, non adivasis, Bengalis, Telugus, Marathis and Oriya, i.e., people belonging to various areas and nationalities in the DK movement now. So *Jhankar* is a multi-lingual magazine. We are trying to make writers not only out of people but out of cadres also . . . They express excellently all their problems, sufferings, happiness and feelings in those songs . . . CNM members are also learning to read and write now. We are correcting and publishing their writings and developing them. There are some shortcomings in this effort too. We are not able to concentrate fully on what the new writers are writing and on improving them.

What about the discussion within the party on the Gondi script? We were told that right now they were using the Devanagari script, the same as is used for Hindi, to write Gondi. However, they were now veering towards the view that Gondi must have its own separate script. What Jan Myrdal had said was recounted, that even his own mother tongue Swedish uses the Roman alphabet but has added three letters which enable sounds specific to Swedish to be used. The advantage is that by retaining a common alphabet there is scope for cross-cultural interaction and learning. If there had been a separate script for Swedish, this separateness could have fed isolation. But we were told that this may be true but only partially as far as Gondi was concerned.

Lenj said that there are many sounds absent, such as ‘gh’ or ‘sh’. Thus if people have a script of their own in which their own special sounds and intonations can be expressed, they will find it easier to identify with it because the representation, i.e., the alphabet, is easier to pick up and faster to learn. Will not a common script enable people to communicate across cultural boundaries?

While they debate this issue of the script, it was once again brought home to me that the projected image of a militarized and violent Maoist did not quite jibe with the actual reality of members engaged in a variety of cultural, economic, political and social issues of wider concern.

Unanswered Questions

Right from the first day, and even during the interview with the GS, questions about the debacle in AP figured prominently. Each time I was told we will discuss it later. ‘Later’ did not materialize. However, I was told that documents of the Unity Congress are there for me to read. The political report of the seventh party congress says that those who were in favour of talks had argued that

> [t]he question of going for talks is an issue related to political tactics and utilization of the contradictions within the ruling classes. Ever since the . . . declaration of Naxalism as the principal agenda in its election manifesto by the TDP (Telugu Desam Party) the political situation in the state had taken a significant turn and issue of talks came prominently to the forefront . . . It was thus an outcome of public pressure . . . and in such a situation our party would only have been isolated if it did not go for talks.

They argued that

> we were clear in our assessment that the period of ceasefire would not last for more than six months and that there will not be any substantial outcome from the talks, the short period of relaxation would also be used to some extent for conducting revolutionary propaganda . . . The current losses in AP are not related to talks but are a result of our overall weak subjective strength as well as some long term weaknesses.

Those critical of this line held that

> The demand of the then existing concrete objective condition was to utilize the relaxation in the enemy’s repression in order to complete the preparation for confronting future offensive and for advancing the war and thereby strengthen our subjective forces. The tactics of talks was in no way in accordance with this demand.

They also argued that '[a] t that time our underground Party structure, secret functioning and our armed strength were weak'.

This view prevailed because by a majority vote the Congress expressed the opinion that 'taking into consideration the concrete objective situation in AP and the concrete subjective condition of our Party at that time it was not correct to go for talks with the AP government.'

This leaves us with tantalizing questions. Talks in themselves were not opposed but objectives sought to be achieved at that moment were unclear. What were the subjective weaknesses both sides allude to? What were the 'long term weaknesses'? If talks had to be pursued and the party assessment was that they would not last beyond six months; why did they expose their rank and file by organizing mass meetings in the full glare of intelligence agencies who meticulously video-graphed them and used it to track down underground members later? Knowing their own 'long term weaknesses' and erosion of subjective factors what did the party stand to gain from entering into talks? Why did the party on a few occasions even go against the three mediators appointed by them? For years critics had been referring to the criminal acts of party members and how sincere activists were feeling isolated and frustrated at this decline in commitment and discipline—why was this ignored? There were so many questions but this was one issue on which they remained silent and avoided any discussion. At times I wondered if the debacle was too close for the party leaders to look at it objectively or if it was the fear of discussing with me knowing fully well that I would then not hesitate to include it in my reportage. The possibility of getting to know how war, peace and issues of dialogue figure in their thinking, nevertheless, got left out because the GS and others refused to discuss what went wrong in AP and where they went wrong.

What is, nevertheless, clear is that at the party congress the majority voted against this. Also if holding of talks was wrong in AP, as the majority believed at the Congress, then was it that the party approached talks in West Bengal along the majority line at the Unity Congress 2007 on the issue of talks in AP, i.e., 'to utilize the

relaxation in the enemy's repression in order to complete the preparation for confronting future offensive'? In Azad's interview to *The Hindu* he had amplified the four demands put forward by the general secretary of the CPI (Maoist) and had clarified that 'to hold talks it is necessary for the Government to release some leaders. Or else there would be none to talk to since the Party is illegal. We cannot bring any of our leaders over ground for the purpose of talks'. He went on to insist that 'the mistakes committed in AP during talks with the government will not be repeated'.

And yet, not only did the communist revolutionaries lose a senior leader like him in pursuit of talks but also others including Kishanji in West Bengal sixteen months later. So what were the lessons learnt from AP? Is there another lesson to be learnt from the dastardly custodial killings of Azad and Kishanji? It is this that convinces me that more than the conduct of 'peace' talks what matters is how Maoists wage their People's War. Because, as they themselves claim, 'peace' talks are a matter of tactics, while waging PW is the strategy for the successful consummation of revolution. It is their PW which informs their tactics of talks. So could it be that Azad was hinting towards this when he said that 'the setback we had suffered in most parts of AP is not a fallout of talks but due to several inherent weaknesses of our Party in Andhra Pradesh and our failure to adopt appropriate tactics to confront enemy's tactics. This is an entirely different subject . . .' A 'different subject', no doubt, but *the* subject in need of amplification and elaboration.

End of Our Journey

It took us seventeen hours of trekking to return from Abujmaad, spread over one and a half days. Our time in the guerrilla zone was coming to an end. Another day and we would be making our way back. We had one last meeting with some senior cadres. They wanted to thank Jan Myrdal and me for coming. After the formalities were done, songs were sung, lal salaams were exchanged and our return journey began.

As we walked and halted to rest and eat something there was some commotion. Not very far from where we were, it was said, a police party had been sighted. We had to retrace our steps while a team was sent to find out. We sat waiting. After a few hours of anxious wait, the patrol party returned to say that it was a false alarm. False alarm? Either there was a police foray into the area or there was not. It was explained that the police did enter, as they do on patrols, but what matters is the direction in which they were heading. If they had been headed our way, then there was a likelihood that they knew about our presence. Since they were moving in another direction, it obviously meant that this was a routine patrol and they did not know about us. So we started walking once again.

As we drew close to the stream which made up the boundary of the guerrilla zone we fell silent. All of us were immersed in our own thoughts. I walked faster than the others and a young PLGA comrade asked, ‘Dada, you seem to be in too much of a hurry to get back?’ Yes, I said, because I did not like the idea of pining for them while I was still with them and wanted to return soon so that the emptiness in my heart would get filled by meeting my dear and near ones. He smiled as though grasping what I meant. The first sight of

the stream told us that the journey was truly coming to an end and once we cross the stream and say our goodbyes maybe this would be the last time we would see many of them. But one thing I knew: that one had to sit down and write. That's the least I could do.

Of course, I was not to know then that within a year I would be revisiting the guerrilla zone and would get to meet some of the party members I had got to know. But that is another story.[56]

What I Believe

What is my overall impression? How do I read the Maoist movement in Dandakaranya?

In the postscript to the new edition of his classic *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Sumanta Bannerjee writes that

> [i]ndependent of the controversy over objectives and methods that they might follow, the historian has to acknowledge that this party [CPI(Maoist)] among all the various Naxalite groups, carries on the spiritual legacy of the [Naxalite] movement, which was essentially rooted in the strategy of a revolutionary change through armed struggle that was inaugurated in Naxalbari in 1967.[57]

In this sense, the Maoists are also the spiritual heirs of the Gadar Party and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. Both subscribed to a progressive and secular vision and a belief in the people having their own army to defend themselves against foreign and domestic reactionary rule. The survivability of this ideological stream in India is both testimony to the felt need by a section of the 'poorest among the poor' as well as the continued relevance of a militant alternative to the present iniquitous system.

Few people's movements in India have so much to their credit with so little written about them. Instead so much abuse has been hurled at them. Those who believe in 'liberty with equality' must rejoice at the remarkable strides Maoists have made and for showing us how far the spirit of 'serving the people' can take us. As mortals, bound to err, they have shown what unflinching commitment to bring about social transformation actually involves. Critics can find faults, magnify them, over-read them, rulers can try to 'eliminate', 'cripple' and 'choke them', to use the words employed by the PM, to wipe them out. However, it is not possible to deny the fact that they are

rooted among the people. They survive because of this, and they are expanding politically because a significant number of the oppressed look to them for help. It's not only about Maoists reaching out to people. People are reaching out to them and inviting them to enter new areas, to assist them in their everyday struggles. Therefore, I believe that whether they are dealt a setback or lose their base or bases here or there, this movement is not going to be obliterated. They have taken root among the people and if they are pushed from one area they will sprout elsewhere. This is the significance of their claim that they are thinking in terms of fifty–sixty years and not just here and now. This marks a seminal shift in the revolutionary movement in India. Unlike the Telangana uprising (1946–52), which, once it ended, did not sprout elsewhere in India, the Naxalbari movement, for all its mistakes, hyperbole and politics of reckless bloodletting, survived because it struck a chord among the oppressed. Therefore, suppressed in one area they emerged in another, suppressed there they reared their head elsewhere . . . and so it has carried on belying claims that armed struggle is passé or unsuitable for India because of Indians' innate distaste for violence.

Two generations have grown up and a third is getting influenced by the idea of rebellion against an unjust and iniquitous system. This gives the movement a continuity and rootedness making it difficult to write it off. The simple truth is that if the Indian State continues to prosecute a war of suppression against its own people to preserve the present status quo, it should not expect that all sections of the Indian people will sit back and allow themselves to be subjugated without a fight. The Maoist movement therefore is a reminder that the use of coercive powers of the State against the people, especially those resisting exploitation, will not go unchallenged or uncontested. Six decades since the 'Transfer of Power' and two centuries of colonial rule ought to invite a rethink among those wielding power that armed resistance will remain a part of Indian social and political reality, so long as prosecution of war against people is not given up.

Not many social or political activists lead the lives which Maoists/Naxalites do. To live, eat, sleep, dress, talk and work

amongst the poorest and the most deprived people requires courage and commitment. It is easy to carry on a life of comfort and pay lip service to radicalism, just as it is easy to misread passivity for non-violence and preach peace while acquiescing in wars of suppression launched by the Indian State. Their existence is testimony to their achievement of having taken root among the people. While urban scholars and activists talk about alternative development models and paradigms, here are Maoists who have been practising them for the last thirty years among millions of Indians. And not only are they developing agriculture, introducing social and economic reforms, debating social mores but are also engaged in working out their own approach to industrialization and mining. It may be a small step when one considers the vast canvas of India. But is there any other political formation which has come anywhere close to working in harmony with nature even when the people progress? What they have achieved against the many odds deserves respect and admiration.

Ironically, whatever document one was given to read or whichever conversation we had was invariably punctuated with their admission of many a shortcoming or mistake or weakness. One of the things which struck me was that unlike elsewhere where people tend to exaggerate their achievements, here the party was being modest about them, constantly talking about the problems they face or what needed to be done. For instance, I asked why it is that there is so little written material in the shape of travelogues, reportage, party documentation, etc., on the DK movement? There are a few books available in Hindi, even these are translated from Telugu or Punjabi, and there is a booklet brought out by the party on the development work in DK which is available in English and Hindi. But these are very few. P. Shankar's book *Yeh Jungle Hamara Hai* (This Forest Belongs to Us) needs updating since it was written in 1997 in Telugu and later translated into Hindi. The answer was that somehow they never got round to writing about their work. Why? Did they not know that their detractors have used this knowledge deficit about their work to malign them? Was it not necessary to list their achievements and how these were brought about?

By the time they realized this, they were in the initial period of Salwa Judum when they were blamed for bringing ‘white terror’ upon themselves. They were accused of dividing the adivasis and of using violence to destroy the efforts being made by social activists to mobilize people for non-violent struggle. Specifically, they were charged with having stopped adivasis from plucking tendu leaf. Whereas

> the truth was that we were opposed to the government-announced price of less than Rs 0.50 for a bundle of fifty leaves when private contractors were offering nearly double the rates. That was the period when we realized some intellectuals were levelling charges against us by believing what was told to them in the Salwa Judum camps.

But why did they not publicize their achievement? Here they were practising alternate ‘development’, enriching adivasi society be it in terms of economic activities, health, education, development of their language (developing a new script) and preserving tribal culture. Why did they not encourage more write-ups on their experience and work in DK? I could not find satisfactory answers.

My own take is that for years DK was seen as an adjunct to the movement in AP, as a forest retreat or a safe rear for the movement, then strong in AP. But once the cadres of the then CPI (ML) PW entered here in the 1980s they could not but have begun their political work among the adivasis. The successes they met kept helping them to consolidate and expand. By the time it took root, and what the Maoists call the organs of people’s power began to evolve, nearly two decades had passed. It was around the turn of this millennium that serious efforts were made to invite writers to come, visit and write. I recall being first invited some time in 2001–02. This desire picked up with the unification and formation of CPI (Maoist) in 2004 with significant presence of Maoists in several states and despite the setback experienced in AP.

The remarkable thing is that the party in DK is strongly located among the poor adivasis and women. The advantage of entering an area overlooked by the Indian State for decades, where political parties were marked by their absence, provided them a tremendous

advantage they seized. As a result, the progress made, the utilization of resources—against the Indian State's record where seventeen paise for every rupee allocated reaches the people, here nearly every paisa serves the people—the frugality of party members' life in DK and in the PLGA (the backbone of the movement) makes for a powerful statement. It shows collective work and commitment to serve the people can make even limited resources go a long way. I did not probe whether they debate, while utilizing resources, the choice between equity and efficiency or how they resolve it. But it was clearly evident that the emphasis was on reaching out to as many as possible with minimum wastage. The way in which every scrap of paper was saved and used was an everyday reminder. Every scrap was used for scribbling a message, instruction or requirement. Life remains tough. The problems the party faces are mounting: on the one hand the offensive and the encirclement by the State and on the other, the loss of human and material resources.

However, the point is that while they face problems they have been conducting what the Maoists call the 'rectification' campaign or correcting mistakes. The setback in AP, the savage attack under Salwa Judum, from which they emerged strong, prepared them for learning from mistakes in DK. If one reads, for instance, the party document on rectification being carried out by them, it reveals that most examples they cite are probably drawn from outside DK. Let me illustrate by quoting a document called the 'New Circular on Rectification' (undated):

> a) In some areas, the lands occupied from landlords in the past are lying fallow due to government repression; when the landlords try to sell these lands, the rich peasants and middle peasants are purchasing them. On such occasions, instead of bringing pressure through the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, who occupied those lands, on those who purchased the lands and stopping the sales, the squads themselves have been thrashing the rich and middle peasants who purchased the lands.
>
> b) In the struggle for the eradication of bad habits like liquor consumption, educating the people with a long term view is lacking; in

the struggle to obstruct the manufacture of arrack, instead of rallying the people, especially the women, prominence is being given to squad actions only. Physical punishments are being imposed disregarding class basis.

c) When problems arise in man–woman relations, especially in matters relating to marriage, judgements are being given without taking into view the social problems women face.

d) In various kinds of people's 'Panchayats' instead of listening to the versions of both sides apart from gathering the needed information from others in the villages also, one sided judgements are being delivered, under the effect of sectarianism.

e) When some among the people commit mistakes, when they oppose our mass organisations, or when they are suspected to be working as informers, punishments much beyond their wrongs are being imposed.

Squads have progressed to platoons and companies and now they are talking of raising battalions. It is not possible to sustain this or even conceive of it without being confident about a stable social support base. In Bastar where land was distributed, the ousted landlords have not been able to either sell or retake possession of their lands expropriated from them and distributed to poor adivasis by the JS. This is contrary to what happened in AP. In AP agricultural land, nearly 1,00,000 acres of which was distributed, lay fallow because police and civil authorities made sure that the Dalits who became the owners of this land did not cultivate those fields. Or if they did, the harvest was destroyed. Meanwhile attempts were made by the landlords to sell off the land, which was then thwarted through guerrilla squad action instead of mobilizing the people. This practice of squads carrying out preventive actions against land takeover and over-emphasis on armed actions replaced mass mobilization and contributed to the party's decline in AP.

The practice followed in DK was different. In DK during the peak of Salwa Judum these lands may have remained fallow, but by now adivasi peasants have begun to return to cultivate the lands, and the area of land which remains fallow has shrunk. Ousted landlords joined Salwa Judum to wreck havoc but dare not reoccupy their lands. Also in Bastar, the JS extends credit and seeds to poor

peasants and loans to purchase pairs of bullocks to encourage them to take to ploughing their fields rather than using shovels. Besides, in DK's JS areas there are no arrack shops and only traditional liquor is brewed. Therefore, mobilizing women against arrack shops, so effective in the 1980s phase of the movement in AP, is not needed here. The incidence of alcoholism is far less common. Punishments meted out are not excessive in light of the wrongs committed. People are proud that ordinary crimes have reduced. Finally, as an adivasi comrade said, in AP, unlike here in DK, party members had become a little lazy. He said here in DK we do all the work ourselves, carry our own supplies and even when we fetch from the haat everyone has to chip in to carry them.In AP people would use their mobile phones and place an order and provisions would arrive by tractor or jeep. He said they thereby exposed themselves to informers and infiltration.

That's anecdotal, although there might be some truth in the charge. But the Political Organisational Report of the Ninth Congress, also called the Unity Congress, draws attention, amongst other things, to the following weakness:

> Our grassroots Party organization is weak with insignificant party units at the village level. Some states have formed the Party units at the village level but they are non-functional. In many areas our Party activity is still squad centred. This makes the masses passive supporters and dependent on the squads for taking up struggles and in solving the issues at the village level.

Could these mistakes cited in the document on rectification, therefore, allude to what went wrong in AP as well as in Bihar–Jharkhand? The issue of *People's March* (October 2004–September 2005) carries a report from the Bihar–Jharkhand special area committee on 'rectification'. The report is a sharp and frank indictment of certain practices that had emerged in some areas where the Maoists worked. It deserves to be quoted:

> In recent years, large scale relief and reform programmes launched by the government have created a huge battery of contractors and middle-men in the rural area. They are the social basis of various

> groups of ruling class parties. Locally, they maintain links with organizers (comrades at zone and even higher levels), appease them, assure block officials and engineers that they can 'manage' the 'new government' and get hold of contracts. During polls, these are the elements who wean away people to polling stations. That relations with such type of contractors have been maintained by party organizers is a matter of concern. Some of our comrades use such contractors not only for various work, but also the most secret work of the Party, and they also share their joys and sorrows. The tiffs between contractors over this or that contract has become a cause for contradiction between our cadres . . . For eg in Chatra, the so called contradiction between Yadavs and Ganjhus is not a contradiction between toiling masses of these two castes, but between contractors and middle-men of these castes.

Among the recommendations, the report calls for ensuring that party members do not take any 'obligation from contractors' unless it is 'first discussed in the concerned committee'. It calls for warning and then expulsion of cadres found to be violating the party's rule for not hobnobbing with contractors and middlemen unless authorized, within limits set by the higher committees.

This is the context which is really important: the way in which Maoists are looked upon and conduct themselves in Bastar, and the support they enjoy cutting across party affiliations as well as socio-economic divides, stands out. A CPI local leader from Dantewada told the *Times of India*[58] that 'Naxalite position at this moment is so strong among the Adivasis that they can, through dialogue bargain . . . for strong measures that would protect the Adivasis, their culture and their national right over their land and forest . . . ' It is equally important to note that a survey carried out by the *Times of India*[59] in five districts of what constitutes the Telangana region, shows that support for Naxalites/Maoists remains high and 60 per cent of the respondents credit them for compelling the government to place *development* on the agenda.

This does not mean that there is 100 per cent identification with everything Maoists preach or practise—only that in the eyes of the people they are a legitimate force and part of their society whom they know as their own and, therefore, trust. This was brought home

to me also when my friend Asish Gupta and I travelled to Jagdalpur to witness a rally on 1 June 2008 of tribal people under the name of Bastar Sambhag Kisan Sangharsh Samiti. The organization was suppressed and its activists arrested for allegedly being a Maoist front. If the charge is true it shows how widespread their support base actually is and that the state is so scared of their popularity that they prefer to crowd Bastar jails with their supporters. We found to our surprise a cross-section of people participating who had grown up in RSS shakhas, educated in Christian ashrams, sadhus, and politicians belonging to the BJP, the Congress and the CPI. We asked them how it was that they were mouthing radical demands and were silent about the crimes of Maoists, allegedly their tormentors, although they were in the relatively safe zone of Jagdalpur. We were told initially they were opposed to the Maoists but their own experience of Salwa Judum, the corporate land grab and forest displacement made them realize that Maoists were not exaggerating when they campaigned against Salwa Judum and its real objective. It was their own life experience which lent credibility to Maoist propaganda.

This has also to be seen in perspective. Imagine an area where a corrupt and oppressive forest department was driven away, a struggle for decent wages was fought and land reforms were brought about, where the party continues to anchor itself among the poor and the most deprived, especially women, and struggles with them to ensure that the people's dignity and honour is not compromised, and that their culture prospers . . . it is then one realizes why Maoists are looked upon as their own credible force by most adivasis. It is quite remarkable that the virulent tone of urban intellectuals, who choose specious arguments or substitute informed criticism with abusive epithets, is shared by precisely that section of adivasis who had earlier wielded power over their own ethnic brethren and who have got marginalized in the course of the thirty years of the Maoist movement. This makes nonsense of the claim that adivasis are caught between the State and Maoists because Maoists are themselves adivasis. And those perpetrating heinous crimes, such as the members of Salwa Judum, happen to belong to the very same

adivasi society, except they were the former chiefs, mukhias and sarpanches. The charge of ‘outsiders’ against the Maoists appears to be odd when one remembers that by that count the real aliens or outsiders happen to be the Indian security forces, bureaucrats, police officers, corporate honchos, traders and social activists.

However, one question which concerned me was this: how does the Maoist movement plan to move from here, their forest stronghold, into the world outside?

Jan Myrdal and I were told in the interview given to us by the GS that this

> is definitely a challenge before us but we are confident that there is an advantage in the long run which cannot be achieved in a short period. But unlike what the enemy wants, to finish this in a short period, we want to stretch this war and transform the situation to our advantage favourable to the revolution.

From what was said I gathered that they expect to expand rapidly in the course of this war, which they argue has been thrust upon them. As happened during the two Jan Jagarans and Salwa Judum, they believe that if they are able to protect their core, no matter how many reverses they may encounter, they will be in a position to sprout elsewhere. How realistic is this assessment? It is one thing to say, which they do in *Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution*, that ‘[w]hatever the forms assumed by the revolutionary wars in various countries, the content remains the same i.e. the seizure of power by armed forces’, but surely such armed seizure of power must be tempered by changing social reality?

Let me start first by taking up the question of violence in order to take the argument a little further.

Morality Rises on a Full Stomach

The issue of means and ends, of the natural aversion of people towards violence, the fact that an armed group or party can end up using its weaponry to impose its will, etc., are arguments employed against armed resistance. But even here, it cannot be denied that violent resistance has and will continue to play an emancipatory and empowering role. How else can one describe the fight against imperialism in Indo-China or elsewhere? Did not the victory of Japan against Russia in 1905 enthuse the Asian people to challenge European racism? Did not the experience of Indian soldiers who fought for the British Empire in Sudan, Iraq, China and the Crimea help them realize that they were as good as, if not better than, European soldiers. Did not many become radicalized and get inspired by the 1917 Russian revolution? Can we deny that the heroism and bravery of Russians, led then by Stalin during the Second World War, especially the defeat of the German elite forces in Stalingrad, mark the beginning of the defeat of the Nazi army? Why should one dismiss this reality? Why should we not celebrate their heroism?

Some argue they are not against war but the use of political violence to achieve political goals. Thus the opposition is not per se against violence, only against organized violence because the very fact of organized violence is anti-democratic. As a matter of fact there is nothing more harmful than a so-called spontaneous uprising of the people where a killing spree ensues. In France after the Second World War 45,000 ‘Nazi collaborators’ were lynched. How is this massacre at all superior?

But are not means important? Can we reach the ends we desire by recourse to means which are violent?

Even the most ardent proponents of non-violence concede that violence in certain conditions or circumstances becomes legitimate. Stopping a riotous mob from lynching those less privileged, raping women, killing children . . . particularly when it is conceded that the state also engages in *prolonged* or *protracted* use of force and violence, in the name of counter-insurgency, to suppress people's movements, and uses its monopoly over the means of violence to ensure that the oppressed never gain the upper hand. Therefore, why hesitate from accepting that the use of force in the pursuit of freeing people from exploitation and oppression is equally legitimate, even when we must acknowledge that *not every act* of resistance ipso facto furthers people's cause.

Interestingly, a lot of people lament the death of government combatants and invoke their working class or rural poor background to accuse Maoists of needlessly targeting them. But in so doing they tend to absolve such security force personnel of any guilt or agency. Security forces can rape, loot, destroy, torture . . . so should we contend that their class background absolves them of guilt? Admittedly, not every military combatant is a rapist or a brute. The very fact that no less than 25 per cent of security force personnel developed psychological disorders while serving in Jammu and Kashmir—because they were troubled by the brief given to them to terrorize civilians—goes to show that there are a fairly large number of soldiers with a conscience. A number of military personnel want to be moved away from war zones such as Bastar. Some even claim that they did not enlist to fight wars against their own countrymen. Such personnel form a minority. Just as it is a minority of Maoist combatants who are guilty of war crimes. Yet, we have to explain why the Indian security forces in the summer of 2008, 2009 and 2010 went out of their way to brutally suppress weaponless popular protests in Kashmir. Whereas they treated with kid gloves a parochial and right-wing-led movement in Jammu's predominantly Hindu districts in the summer of 2008 demanding transfer of forest land in Kashmir for Amarnath pilgrims. On the other hand, where stood those who shed tears for soldiers killed by the Maoists when it came to J&K where children pelting stones were beaten to death or

shot? Why this silence? Does it mean that no public manifestation was to be allowed to Kashmiris—not even people protesting killings by security forces or demanding justice—because anybody who voices a demand for ‘Azadi’ becomes an ‘enemy’ worthy of being killed! Where did the love and affection for non-violence vanish?

It could be that we are schooled to accord legitimacy to the State employing violence, even when it can be demonstrated that in sixty-four years since the ‘Transfer of Power’ not a single year has passed when the Indian military has not been used to suppress our own people raising legitimate demands. The innumerable crimes committed by the military in the ignoble task of military suppression of our own people has not resulted in the ‘good people of India’ launching a campaign asking for outlawing waging war against our own people. What does the silence of the ‘good people’ represent? Acquiescence and support for the Indian State’s wars against our own people? Paradoxically, when the PM on 7 July 2009 on the floor of the Lok Sabha declared that war as an option is ruled out against Pakistan, a country painted in the vilest manner by the media and establishment, no one bothered to ask the PM, why not rule out war against our own people too? If engagement and dialogue is the only way out with a neighbouring country, why not pursue the same approach with our own people? If a constituency for peace exists in India and rapprochement with Pakistan will see it expand, then why cannot the government have the same approach towards our own people? If the Indian State outlaws war against our own people it will be the surest way of ensuring that people do not take recourse to violence to make themselves heard or be taken seriously—and to that extent undercut the appeal of armed resistance.

The Declaration of Human Rights 1948, in the third preamble to the Declaration, states that if these rights are ignored, governance will become tyrannical and the response will be rebellion. In other words, rebellion is an inherent and an inalienable right which comes into play when the State, which monopolizes the means of violence, employs it in a partisan manner to defend the present status quo, and perpetuates and reproduces oppressive conditions for the mass of people. Such conditions, real or potential, enable ruling classes to

subject people to a life of indignity and enslavement. Freedom and liberty remain the prerogative of the rich to enjoy. A Dalit or an adivasi, or a youth found with Marxist literature or even Ambedkar or Bhagat Singh's books, is often seen as a real or potential Naxalite, just as an educated Muslim youth, expressing his views about injustice against those who happen to be Muslims, is perceived as a real or potential 'jehadi'. Just contrast how Dalit cultural artists in Maharashtra are being hunted by the police whereas the fascist thugs of Shiv Sena, MNS and RSS can merrily go on with their parochial, communal and criminal activities. Working people are vulnerable; no sooner do they appear to have succeeded in mobilizing people and begin to question the inequalities and inadequacies of the system than they become the target of State's oppressive ways. There is not a peasant, Dalit, tribal or trade union movement that has not been victimized or threatened in our own times in the name of crushing the Maoist insurgency. Therefore, unless the State is made to outlaw war against the people, that is, disengage from prolonged violent suppression of people fighting for a life of dignity and for the right to determine their future, there is no point preaching non-violence. Put it another way: rebellion derives its legitimacy from the fact that the sovereign power, the people, have the right to rebel against a tyrannical system. Now, this could be all across the country as happened during the Emergency (1975–77) or regionalized or localized such as in the north-east and Jammu and Kashmir where the security apparatus calls the shots and even the constitutional freedoms remain handmaidens of the security apparatus.

Therefore, when discussing the rights and wrongs of violence '[s]ound ethics requires us always to judge the action by the results, good or bad, and not by its conformity to a rule, regardless of results'.[60] It is argued that

> [t]he principle that it is never right to depart from moral principles, even to achieve some good end, no matter how many people would suffer if the rule were not broken, far from reflecting a superior ethical standpoint, is supremely unethical and is generally regarded as

> such.[61] [The] real issue . . . over means and ends is not therefore as to whether we may or may not adopt means involving evil to attain a good which outbalances that evil or to avoid a still greater evil, but as to whether the good attained is really worth the cost, or whether there is another route to that good involving less evil.[62]

India, for all its verbosity about non-violence, is also one of the most heavily armed States both in terms of accumulation of the destructive power of its arsenal as well as the size of its military force, which gets multiplied by draconian laws, and thus enables the ruling classes to practise ‘slow genocide’. There are no less than 3.5 million military forces (army, Central paramilitary forces and the reservists). To this one has to add more than 2 million police (30 per cent of which, at a conservative estimate, comprises armed police), and the 70,046 SPOs, who form more like an unaccounted private army handled by middle-ranking security officers posted in conflict areas of India carrying out the dirty tasks assigned to them. This is a formidable military force at the service of the rulers. Note that at least 50–60 per cent of this huge government military machine is fighting our own people in different parts of India. With laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, which bans political movements and ideologies (though not Hindu communal–fascist organizations such as RSS, VHP or Bajrang Dal), we have this force deployed against those fighting for a life of dignity and justice for our people.

It is also a mark of violent India that 42 per cent of children below six years suffer from malnutrition, malnourishment and stunted growth. Two years of recurrent malnourishment can cause irreparable damage to the cognitive abilities of children. The government, by playing around with calorie intake, i.e., bringing it down from 2400 to 1800 or even to 1500, can statistically reduce the number of people living below the poverty line and thus reduce the food security entitlement for hundreds of millions of Indians. This exposes our own people to a slow death. Ironically, India dropped to the one-hundred-and-thirty-fourth position on the global human development index even as we moved up the ladder, to occupy the

ninth position, in military spending, and have become the twelfth-largest economy where 1,26,700 High Net Worth Individuals in India own one-third of the gross national income of the country, whereas at least 645 million Indians suffer the pangs of poverty and deprivation.

India has one doctor for 1700 people, whereas the global ratio is 1.5 per 1000 persons. The Planning Commission says India is short of 6,00,000 doctors, 1,00,00,00 nurses and 2,00,000 dental surgeons.[63] 5 per cent of the medical workforce is abroad. Social sector spending (education, health, rural development and agriculture) is Rs 1,99,187 crore in the 2011–12 Union budget or 2.1 per cent of the projected GDP of Rs 89,80,860 crore, which is well below 3 per cent of the GDP for health and 6 per cent of the GDP for education alone. As against this, the military budget of the Union government is Rs 2,27,000 crore or 2.6 per cent of the GDP.

Writing on India's human guinea pigs and deaths in clinical trials, Jisha Krishnan said:

> As per official data 132 people died in 2007. The number rose to 288 in 2008 and 637 in 2009 and 462 till June 2010 . . . whether it is the case of young girls 'dying by mistake' during the cervical cancer vaccine trial or cancer drug under investigation being administered to unsuspecting patients, the victims are invariably poor and helpless.[64]

So life is cheap in India.

The cost of removing hunger for 239 million households in India has been calculated to be Rs 1,74,381 crore for 101 million tonnes of foodgrains at 35 kg per person per household. The cost recovered from selling this at Rs 3 per kg comes to Rs 30,240 crore. The current subsidy is Rs 55,578 crore and additional requirement is Rs 88,563 crore.[65] Significantly *revenue forgone* by the government, or subsidy to the corporate sector, shows in 2010–11 it was Rs 5,60,000 crore, of which excise duty forgone was Rs 1,98,291 crore, custom duty Rs 1,74,418 crore, corporate tax Rs 88,263 crore and personal income tax Rs 50,698 crore. It has been shown that the fiscal deficit of 5.9 per cent or Rs 5.22 lakhs is just a little less than the Rs 5.28 crore subsidy provided to the corporate sector and rich

Indians. Thus shortfall in revenue due to subsidy given to the corporate sector can be more than made up by reversing the tax holidays extended to the rich and the powerful. The resource crunch is a misnomer. Resources are available; it is a matter of choice that the rulers opt to benefit the corporate sector rather than to remove hunger that afflicts 239 million households. Consider the fact that of the 55 lakh government employees across India more than half belong to the military. The armed forces of the Union have 30 lakh personnel and it is the only sector where employment is being generated, a singularly wasteful and useless way to harness labour power, especially when more than 50 per cent of this force is actually engaged in fighting our own people.

To then argue that structural violence is secondary to political violence means it is an ideological positioning. Structural violence is indeed the most glaring form of the politics of bloodshed. It is a conscious ideological construction to downplay the complicity of the rulers in causing the slow death of millions, caused by the policies (or the lack of them) of the government in the interest of ensuring super-profits for the corporate sector, Indian and foreign, and their minions. To then exaggerate just *one type* of political violence, primarily aimed at ending the exploitation of a person by another person is as good as telling people to wait patiently for the fruits of 'development' to fall into their lap as in a fable. This may be a touching display of fortitude and of religious faith but for the fact that those at the receiving end may be getting restless after six decades of waiting.

The issue of weapons must also be placed in perspective. According to the International Action Network on Small Arms, there are an estimated 40 million private weapons in India.[66] It does not require rocket science to believe that these tens of millions of weapons are mostly in the possession of those who wield power and are privileged. If one were to add the proliferation of private security agencies and corporate security, which is now asking for the arming of guards with lethal weapons, the sheer size of the arsenal in private hands could be higher. The poor have no defence against

these government forces or private corporate armed forces. Imagine if you are an adivasi living in the Sundergarh district of Orissa, which boasts of forty-three sponge iron mills notorious for pollution and for using unconstitutional means to set up units in reserve forests, by grabbing land belonging to the tribals. Suppose one finds that a private unit has clandestinely been permitted to set up a sponge iron unit on tribal land near a reserve forest and it begins to use muscle power to force peasants to sell their land. Those who defy are beaten and warned that they will receive no money if they defy. One fine day people discover that the company has begun to build a wall around their hamlets, has encroached on forest land and the government pond, and their land or access to it is now barred. They begin an agitation and suddenly the security guards of the company swoop down on them and force them away. Before they can do anything the police land up and, instead of acting against the security guards, file cases against the villagers for violation of public order, disrupting movement of goods and traffic on a national highway . . . what should the people do? This is no fiction but the reality in large parts of India where rule of law has become a rule to coerce people and loot public resources.

Given the propensity of the Indian government to opt for military suppression of its own people who question inherent inequalities and impoverishment, I have no reluctance in saying that for me the legitimacy of the Maoist armed struggle is not an issue. Instead when we turn to the revolutionary Left several things ought to be kept in mind. The dice is loaded, so to say, in India against those who fight against exploitation and oppression. Nor is there a level playing field between left- and right-wing parties in India because right-wing extremism enjoys corporate financing, political patronage and police protection. The Union home minister, P. Chidambaram, scoffed at the idea of monitoring the activities of Hindu right-wing extremists claiming that the National Investigation Agency is sufficient to deal with them.[67] But he failed to explain why the MHA has had separate cells for decades which have been monitoring minorities, Maoists/Naxalites, Kashmiris, Assamese, Meitis and

Nagas. Why not do away with these cells too and let the NIA intervene when a heinous crime gets committed? The Union home secretary went one better by claiming that 'right now they (right-wing extremists) are not that big a threat . . . '[68] This is strange when the six-decade-long involvement of the RSS and its affiliates in anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rioting, massacres and bloodletting before and after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and the Gujarat carnage, are all there for us to see. The government refuses to even admit that majoritarian communalism is afflicting security force personnel, thanks to their prolonged deployment in military suppression in places, where a community or ethnic group gets singled out. In other words, how is this stance of the UPA home minister and the home secretary different from that of BJP leader L.K. Advani who as the Union home minister, when confronted with Bajrang Dal's weapons' training camps, rubbished this by saying that the weapons were only air rifles. Just as *trishul*s with three-inch blades distributed by Bajrang Dal in public functions are considered harmless. They are not covered by the Arms Act and yet were responsible for 60 per cent of the wounds inflicted by Hindutva gangsters on Muslims in Gujarat in 2002.

The radical Left is worse off because those working over ground regularly face the coercive powers of the State, even when they work for the implementation of laws enacted by the Parliament. Thus there is an innate bias which the Left parties, in particular, the revolutionary Left, invariably face. But a mass murderer can be celebrated as a harbinger of 'development', and a party implicated in the most horrible crimes against our own people and representing self-serving nationalism can go through a makeover and emerge as a 'responsible' party.

But violence has an emancipatory role when the oppressed are able to defend themselves, when they can save people from being trampled upon by a ruthless military which invariably sides with the rich, the powerful and the privileged. To pick up guns, to learn to handle guns, to harness it for the greater common good, cannot be considered 'evil' because violence is value-neutral. It is how violence

is harnessed, for what purpose it is used, that becomes of relevance. To assume that just because communal fascists use violence and therefore there is no difference between how they use and anyone else uses it, or that it is one and the same, is a gross misrepresentation of social reality. To argue that death caused by communal fascists or Maoists is one and the same—because the fact is that a person dies— is an argument fraught with contradiction. Those who argue thus accept that all deaths caused by the government forces, *khap* panchayats, sati and what have you, are one and the same because in the end someone is killed. By this logic rioters killed by security forces are one and the same as murders caused by fake encounters. Or the lynching to death by the slum dwellers of Nagpur of a gangster is the same as a khap panchayat carrying out the murder of those who fall in love. This is twisted logic. It should matter for the living why deaths take place; the motivation and intent behind them should be understood. The political reason behind an act of violence is important. And so getting to know or having an informed view is imperative. Or it will make inconsequential the difference between extremist right-wing groups for whom a community becomes the enemy and terrorizing civilians is considered perfectly legitimate, and the violence of left-wing radicals whose focus is on ending the material conditions of oppression, in the course of which conflict can result in armed hostilities.

It is this that convinces me that this war will be unlike any other war which the Indian government has waged in the last six decades against our own people. It will test the resilience of the Indian State as has never been done before. Precisely because it is a war in which people are fighting in their own territory to save their land, forest, water, minerals from being grabbed and they are convinced that they have an alternate vision, not just for themselves, the adivasis, but for Indian people as a whole. It is very different when a people feel that destiny beckons them to emancipate themselves in order that they can inspire their fellow countrypeople to rally around them and follow their example.

Those who decry armed struggles claim that popular movements can make existing institutions responsive to people's needs. The fact of the matter is that such efforts were being made even when Maoists had not emerged as the single biggest threat to the Indian ruling classes, and these efforts have not ceased because of the Maoist rebellion. So what prevented these groups from stopping the Narmada Sarovar Project, POSCO, illegal mining, the loot of public funds or the relentless wars in the north-east and Kashmir. What stopped them under their own steam from raising their voice against the brutal military suppression of our people? Why did they keep mute when thousands were killed, tortured and 'disappeared' in Kashmir or when aerial bombings were launched against Mizos and Nagas? For sure every movement does not notch up victories and their failures do not make them redundant. But how much did they contribute in raising the consciousness of the people by campaigning against the 'dirty wars' being fought in India, for all their protestations about non-violence? On the other hand, if truth be told, these non-violent struggles have actually gained leverage thanks to the presence of the Maoist movement. They leverage the armed struggle of the Maoists to extract concessions from the State.

Maoists Play a Catalyst's Role

This catalytic role played by the Maoists is quite remarkable, because in 2004–05 Maoists were dealt a blow in Andhra Pradesh and more or less wiped out with a mere presence left in a single district, and this was soon thereafter followed by Salwa Judum-type repression in Chhattisgarh. No one believed that they would emerge strong after this double blow. Well, they did. So much so that almost all the contemporary social welfare legislations, be it the NREGA, the Forest Act, enforcement of the PESA or the proposals to form joint forest management committees managed by the gram sabha . . . have been inspired or advocated by referring to the need to wean away the poorest among the poor from the Maoists/Naxalites.

Consider that the Union tribal affairs minister pointed out to the CMs, at a conference on the FRA in November 2009, that tribals were taking the 'route of Naxalism' as hundreds of them were harassed under the Forest Act 1927 for collecting minor forest produce. At the same conference the prime minister had drawn attention to the need to withdraw lakhs of cases filed since 1980 against tribals for petty crimes, lest such persecution drive them to join Maoists/Naxalites. The Union law minister had opined that '[t]here is a feeling among the common citizens, especially the poor, women, the elderly and the weaker sections, that the legal and judicial process is far removed from them'. He added that the common man's disenchantment was manifesting itself in 'new forms of violence and strife—civil unrest, armed peasant and tribal movements, Naxalite and Maoist rebellion'.[69] When the Planning Commission now complains against the Union Cabinet decision to make the district collector, the superintendent of police and the district forest officer in charge of the Integrated Action Plan they

invoke the fear of Maoists to drive home their argument. Thus the Planning Commission claimed in a letter to the Indian PM that 'more money without reform is in danger of landing in the hands of Maoists themselves'.[70]The minister of environment and forests claimed

> [o]ver 250 million people depend on forests for their livelihood and a major amendment of the Indian Forest Act 1927 will prevent the harassment of tribals by local forest officials . . . In Naxal affected areas a large number of cases are registered against the tribals so we are amending the Forest Act.[71]

The latest in the series of such claims comes in the statement from the Planning Commission that '[a]s desired by the Prime Minister the (Central India Tribal Development) plan would essentially cover all those areas where Naxals either have influence or can have influence in future because of development deficit.'[72] But the most forceful advocacy was that of Union Tribal Affairs Minister V. Kishore Chandra Deo who wrote to the AP Governor to use the special powers vested in him under the Fifth Schedule to cancel bauxite mining in the tribal agency area of Vishakapatnam. And the reason he gave for demanding the cancellation of bauxite mining licences was that 'extremist [read Maoist] activities have now reached a point which is threatening our national security. Your intervention at this stage will not only strike at the basic premise on which the Maoists have gained sympathies, but also send a strong message across the borders of AP to other states like Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand'. [73]

Apart from this, study after study shows how Maoists encourage the rural poor to avail of the various welfare schemes. The Institute of Rural Management, Anand (Gujarat), was given the task of looking into local governance issues by the Union ministry of panchayati raj. When the report was released on 24 April 2010 by the Indian PM the chapter on 'PESA, Militarisation, and Governance' was dropped because the report talked of tribals turning to the Maoists and praised 'the good work done by the (Maoist) party' like mobilizing community labour for farm ponds, rainwater harvesting and land conservation works.

For all the fury directed against the Maoists, the fact remains that but for them millions of the most oppressed and exploited would not have figured in the scheme of things of India's rulers. Even less would have been done for them. Social activists had been fighting for a forest rights bill for years. But it took the war against Maoists to force the UPA government to decide in favour of the Act as a means to appease the enraged tribals. It was also the Maoist presence which forced the UPA government, much against the wishes of the PMO, the finance ministry and the Planning Commission, to find resources to fund the NREGA. Thus the Maoists' presence has goaded rulers towards propagating, even if hypocritically, 'inclusive' growth, lest the most oppressed gravitate towards Maoists.

But even then one must keep one's fingers crossed if one keeps in mind the usual course of every reform in India. Every reform promised as a result of pressure from below has had a chequered journey: from fighting dilution of the legislation, to resisting subversion by manipulating the framing of rules governing the actual working of the law, to struggling against its non-implementation. The history of the PESA enacted in 1996 and the rearguard battle for the FRA 2009 are examples of this. Forcing the government to become sensitive to people's concerns, even if hypocritical, is important, because somewhere it represents the recognition of a problem. By far the biggest contribution of the Maoist movement lies in establishing that rebellion against oppression is necessary and possible and is an intrinsic part of the search for a superior alternative. They break the circularity of argument which tries to convince us that an alternative to the current system is unthinkable. Instead, what matters is to realize that 'economic growth is very important but not an object in itself. It deals in things not human beings . . . [T]o judge a nation's progress you must see what is happening to people's lives.'[74]

For sure Maoists are not the only ones engaged in this task. There is a vast number of groups and parties engaged in resisting oppression. But Maoists are a formidable and integral part of this resistance and actually bear the brunt of the ruling class's wrath

because their presence enables the transformative perspective to remain alive. In this sense if they have to break out of their role as the catalytic agent, i.e., forcing the present State to reform itself, they have to seriously rethink. Granted that banning them robs them of the possibility to organize and mobilize working people. But precisely, therefore, antagonizing those who oppose ‘operation green hunt’ or champion reforms or are engaged in a variety of people’s struggles, is a senseless approach. Maoists can ill afford to be disrespectful of those with whom they differ.

To Fight Honourably if Fight They Must

While armed resistance is legitimate in the face of oppression, it does not confer carte blanche to resistance forces to fight any which way. War in some circumstances is just. But what ensures its justness is also how the war is fought.

Maoists claim to have a Constitution for their JS. Under its Article 5(i) certain guidelines are laid down for death sentence. It says that before the People's Court 'implements death sentence the local people's government have to obtain permission from the higher courts'. For instance, when in Lalgarh, a senior leader of the Maoists, Kishanji, admitted that fifty-two persons were killed in just seven months during January–July 2009, was it carried out after the higher courts upheld the convictions? Did the higher courts apply their mind? Why does the party not come out with a report on this? In the absence of any explanation one does not know if these killings were of political opponents or of those who had committed heinous crimes against the people. This is not how political differences can be resolved. Today if Maoists have been virtually vanquished in Jangalmahal it is not only due to the superior war machinery of the State but in no small measure due to their own conduct which alienated sections of people with some turning against them. Years of selfless and painstaking work carried out by them for nearly two decades stands crushed. In the killing of Niyamat Ansari in 2011 in the Manika block of Latehar district, Jharkhand, we find that he was beaten to death as soon as the verdict of death was announced by a summary trial, not even their People's Court. Thus this was a kangaroo court and not a People's Court. As a result, there was not even the formality of referring the matter to a higher committee for approval. So does it mean that the JS Constitution is a document

followed selectively? Does not the summary trial smack of the very antithesis of a just procedure?

Secondly, what is the nature of the party's control over squads if they carry out an act of summary custodial killing or an act of revenge as in Jamui? The reason for noting this is because it throws up the possibility that their conduct of war and system of justice can become cruel and arbitrary. In other words, Maoists must be measured against the standards they demand from the State and the claim they have set for themselves. There have been several instances of such lapses into criminality. Such lapses belie the claim that they have in place a justice system which is superior. And occasionally in the name of 'class war' they condone war crimes committed by the party's own squads.

In areas where the party was confident of expanding, it sees its prospects under threat. Instead of expanding, there has been shrinkage both in terms of losing areas of influence as well as depletion in the ranks of their political cadres because of killings and arrests. Paradoxically, going by what happened in Jangalmahal, the Maoists snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by scoring a self-goal.

Admittedly, we, who live in urban centres and belong to the middle class, demand that they should not kill anyone taken into their custody. Yet our own experience also shows that such 'goodness' is not followed or reciprocated by the government forces and agencies. We also know our silence acts as acquiescence in murderous attacks by the security forces where they are prosecuting or have prosecuted a war against our own people. Protesting shrilly at the crimes of Maoists but acquiescing in State terror is nothing short of hypocrisy. It is an act of convenience, not conviction. Maoists have risked much and lost much by being swayed by well-meaning individuals and their convictions that dialogue is possible. Again and again the State betrays and violates its pledges, its own laws and negotiated agreements. The execution of the Maoist envoy deputed for talks with the government-appointed Swami Agnivesh, and the refusal of the Orissa government to implement its part of the negotiated bargain which resulted in Maoists releasing the abducted

district collector, R. Vineet Krishna, while the government procrastinated over the release of more than 644 tribals arrested on trumped-up charges because they dared to raise questions about land grab and their displacement, and the government's lukewarm attitude towards other demands publicly conceded, show how the Indian State cannot be trusted. Manipulation has become their second nature.

Is it possible, therefore, that when one pushes the Maoists to accept the Geneva Convention, especially its Article 3 and Protocol II, which apply to conduct of wars not international in nature, one may be exposing them to the 'venomous bites' of the State? Even when this risk remains, there is much to be said in its favour. The Maoists in Nepal and the Philippines declared their adherence to the Geneva Convention and Protocol II. Going by their own argument, that they are defending themselves, it is only fair to demand from them that they set up standards or accept standards which oblige them to conduct their war like a pro-people force defending themselves and worthy of being given their due as legitimate belligerents.

The actual reality of India and the tendency of its rulers to opt for military suppression makes clear that war as a matter of policy will continue to play a role because the Indian State privileges 'politics of bloodshed' over 'politics without bloodshed'. [75] Reeling under one crisis after another, UPA II, or any other formation which today comes to governmental power, would persist with this war to distract attention from scams, looting and price rise and pursue 'enrich-corporatedevelopmment' model. If we take the cae of the provincial armed constabulary of Uttar Pradesh going berserk in Greater Noida in 2011, when two of their colleagues fell to angry protesting peasants, we should try to imagine what takes place in areas far removed from metropolitan centres and the glare of media, in the war zones of India. So revolutionaries cannot emulate the State forces who by the very nature of counter-insurgency warfare fight a war of suppression which is a dirty war made up of massacres,

arson, looting, rape, disappearances, torture, false cases . . . all aimed to terrorize people so they stop supporting the rebels.

If Maoists believe they can become an all-India movement, they will have to work out how they will negotiate their way out of the diversity and plurality of India. Battles may be won militarily but revolutionary wars finally are won on the political front. Without a central focus on participatory democracy, no revolution can survive in twenty-first century India. Democracy is not a tactical question. Even when one critiques formal democracy as being unacceptable, who wields political power and how is important because participatory democracy is and must be the central concern of all revolutions. But what will be the nature of this 'new' democracy remains to be seen because the real challenge lies ahead for the Maoists as much as for the rest of us who imagine an India different from what we live in today. The RPCs are embryonic forms of a system in which people directly participate in the making of their own lives. This is a step forward. But DK has certain specificities of having been left out of the State's reckoning for centuries. Elsewhere Maoists will have to keep in mind that more than hundred years of struggle has won the Indian working class, rural as well as urban, a variety of freedoms. Much of these freedoms have been legislated and exist on paper but are today under attack. Yet if Maoists have to win over the working people in areas where they have no or little presence at present, will they not have to work for expanding these freedoms?

It must also be accepted that the era of one party's seizure of power has receded. In fact it could not happen even in Nepal, our immediate neighbour, where a protracted People's War pitchforked the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to become the leading political force. In contrast to the UCPN (M) all the other parties have at some point or the other used Nepal's army and police as their force, meant to protect them. Of course, the UCPN (M) was sought to be marginalized and kept out of the power equation. They faced acute challenges of how to overcome obstacles placed by a decadent and reactionary amalgam of feudal landlords, politicians belonging to the old order, and an army steeped in feudal ethos and

supported by India, which also maintains a stranglehold over Nepal because of its dependence on India for almost 70 per cent of its external trade and requirements of critical commodities such as oil. For sure Nepal's Maoists are fairly close to forfeiting every gain they made. But that does not cancel out what they could achieve and it showed what was possible.

What Is the Alternative?

Anyone troubled by the deep social cleavages, the relentless struggle to survive, the recurrent nightmare of depending on an officious and arrogant administration, where the corrupt and powerful rule the roost, cannot but wish for a social change which lifts India's billion people out of their degrading existence. To continue to believe that this predatory State can still be made to work for the benefit of the people may be the opinion of some. But there are many who believe that this system is incapable of delivering this goal without a radical overhaul because it is loaded in favour of the rich, privileged and powerful who do not hesitate to take recourse to tyranny to maintain this system. Yes, individuals do at times get justice. People's pressure does push political parties to enact welfare legislations. Elections do throw out a corrupt or a repressive party from government. But this does not end the cycle of oppression or exploitation. And without being compelled, such as by people's resistance, rulers never consider giving even an inch. From the making of a law to its implementation and from preventing its subversion to empowering people, every struggle shows how well entrenched the oppressors are. In this sense, it is good that Maoists will not resile from their goal of social transformation which keeps the fire of rebellion smouldering. But this is not enough.

Pause and consider the received wisdom today which regards the prospects of agriculture playing a role in the country's 'growth story' to be negligible, particularly from the viewpoint of employment generation and as a driver of rapid economic growth. What does the Left, in particular the Maoists, have to offer in contrast to this received wisdom and how do they propose to reverse the decline of agriculture, which accounts for the livelihood needs of 60 per cent of

the rural workforce? Do we not need an alternative, instead of just a critique of the received wisdom? Is it possible to seek solutions in cooperatives or some other form of collective effort? Will land reform/distribution invigorate production and generate employment? Can pooling of fragmented land holdings be done? On the other hand, if manufacturing is the key sector to bring about equitable development, is it to be unbridled growth or be planned? Do we need a capital-intensive or a labour-intensive approach? Do we need manufacturing of goods meant for the masses or do we need luxury goods for gratifying the greed of the rich? Do we need more buses or private vehicles? A public transport system or comfort for the rich and the privileged? Why should 19.9 per cent of the total non-food credit go for personal consumption whereas only 12 per cent go to agriculture which caters to 60 per cent of our people? Do we want subsidies for the corporate sector or public resources allocated for the masses of our people? Can labour-intensive units become energy efficient? If investments have to be made, what should be prioritized? What should be the mineral policy? Should we, for instance, halt the mining of bauxite? Why must this be the case? Do we need poverty reduction so that the State can emerge as a benefactor in front of people? Or is there an alternate vision to simultaneously remove poverty, attack inequalities and empower the people? Is it conceivable that we can arrest environmental degradation and ecological disaster by relying on market forces or do we need a centrally planned economy to wean ourselves away from reckless and anarchic growth? Is it possible for a low consumption economy, which afflicts the mass of our people, to live peacefully with enclaves of overconsumption? Is it not necessary for the Left parties to address the issue of lifting the mass of our people subjected to low consumption while simultaneously curtailing the unbridled growth of the high consuming class? Is it possible to conceive of a system where the oppressed have the dice loaded in their favour? Is it conceivable to stop the egregious loot of public funds by a nexus of corporates, politicians, bureaucrats and police without changing the balance of force between the privileged minority and the oppressed majority?

Furthermore, what is the lesson of the decades long military suppression in the north-east and Jammu and Kashmir? Why does it not encourage those on the Left to ponder the nature of our State which can year in and year out crush movements which demand the right of self-determination, an eminently democratic and peaceful demand? Is the Indian State anti-Muslim, pro-Hindu, racist or a repressive State which presents itself as one or the other, depending on which section of people it is engaged in crushing and therefore demonizing? Why is it that there is neither any section of the Left nor any part of 'civil' society which espouses a campaign demanding that the Indian State outlaw the prosecution of war against our own people, as the most effective way of ending political violence and halting the recurring increase in the war-making efforts of the Indian State?

The point is that for an alternative to become credible it must rise above surface manifestations of wrong and address the underlying causes and processes which account for skewed, unequal and stunted growth and social conflicts. Regrettably, the parliamentary Left, despite fifty-eight years of open politics and despite holding government power at the provincial level, has not offered an alternate vision with its indifferent record of implementing even centrally funded social welfare schemes in the three states where they have ruled (Tripura by far the best, followed by Kerala with West Bengal lagging far behind). It is undeniable that the Left Front has achievements to their credit but why is it that these are not of the kind which fired the imagination of the oppressed to flock to their side in east or south India? Singur in West Bengal was not just a fight over land but also manifested a shocking lack of imagination of the Left in that they chose a private vehicle plant over a bus-manufacturing plant, something badly needed in India. This could have shown that a different way to reduce oil dependence, stop over-exploitation of minerals, end land grab by corporations, etc., was possible. While their failure does not cancel out open overground mass mobilization politics, what it does is to remind us of where we fail and what we lack. The biggest failure of the Left parties, which had come overground at various junctures, is their

marked absence from extra-parliamentary forms of struggle, which is what they had pledged to do when they came overground. They have neither initiated nor led any major struggle despite the persistence of unequal exchange, the low priority given to the interests of small and marginal landholders, the low wage economy ushered in by neo-liberal reforms or the genocidal nature of child malnutrition in India, or fought against price rise, corruption, the bloody repression of people's struggles, or even promoted a countrywide movement against the communal fascism of Hindutva groups. So wedded have they been to the parliamentary system, with its pronounced wheeling and dealing, that they have been lacklustre in the politics of protest.

Finally

Objectively speaking Maoists do not pose as great a security risk as the government claims they do. Nor is there anything which says that Maoists would not want cessation of hostilities. They have taken risks in the past to go in for dialogue and suffered great losses in attempting this, yet they have been subjected to criticism, whereas the government has got away with crimes and criminal conduct, from cold-blooded murder of the person with whom they were indirectly engaged in talks, the abrogation of a publicly announced agreement as in Orissa, and now expanding the war by inviting the army to the dense forests of Bastar, thereby ensuring that the Indian army remains the busiest ‘peacetime’ army fighting its own people. And in order to achieve what? To destroy what Maoists have helped bring about? Nearly two generations old, they have taken root among the most oppressed people, providing them with a hope for the future through organized efforts. They are resilient to the shifting sands of fate. They will scatter and sprout elsewhere if they are driven from one area. Nevertheless, there are several fault lines in the Maoist movement, which threaten them with isolation and obstruct them from spreading and winning over other sections of people, a fundamental requirement for their movement to grow robust. Two major failings stare at them: in the first place they are weak politically and secondly they display a woeful lack of respect for those who differ from them. When this is combined with overemphasis on guerrilla action, where a weaker side has to break the encirclement by carrying out actions to disperse the security forces, then the political weakness and intolerance become near fatal mistakes. Yet it cannot be denied that ceasing guerrilla actions without any reciprocal response from the government side would be an even

worse course for them to take because their political presence and proficiency in guerrilla warfare acts as a check on the innate savagery of forced ‘development’. It is the fear of people joining the Maoists’ ranks which persuades the State to take reformists a little more seriously.

So the war unleashed is dirty not because Maoists are wicked. The wickedness and manipulation is displayed by the Indian State with its unbroken record of six decades of failure to lift people out of a marginal existence, pushing vulnerable sections towards a short and degrading life, the active enrichment of 100-odd families who own one-fourth of our national wealth, and egregious loot of public funds. It is for this reason that the Indian State first engineers a civil war among the people, in this case, the adivasis of Bastar, through the tried and tested policy of divide and rule, and then follows with a mopping-up action by the regular forces. Both phases display the Indian security forces as a ruthless, virtually lawless, force because they operate outside the law and constitutional boundary. The Supreme Court’s repeated criticism has not ended this regime of impunity on the ground. Both the UPA II at the Centre and the BJP at the state level adopted the same stance on Salwa Judum before the Supreme Court, notwithstanding hypocritical public statements, from time to time, expressing concern over Salwa Judum. What they say and what they do or condone is a staggering illustration of deliberate foisting of lawlessness in the war zones whereby security forces can rape, loot, murder all in the name of putting down Maoists, while actually promoting the interests of the corporate sector because the government is sold on the idea that the plunder of India’s resources and the displacement of people from their sources of livelihood is a small price to pay for India’s growth story. The divide and the bitterness which accompanies civil wars are exhibited in all their ugliness in the war zones. The SPOs or the informers carry out, as well as inspire, barbaric attacks and evoke such hatred for their crimes among people at large that even the most peaceable person would not shed a tear at the death of such a perpetrator at the hands of tribal villagers, when they get a chance. Just as in all honesty I did not do when the women of Nagpur lynched the gangster Akku Yadav

on 13 August 2004. With passion running high in the entire Bastar region, therefore, the very presence of Maoists offers the ‘poorest of the poor’ a kind of counterweight to the depredations of the State and its henchmen and teaches people the value of an organized struggle. Also Maoists have tapped into the groundswell of support for transformatory politics because for millions of Indians this system is predatory and has run its course.

The so-called peaceful nature of Indian people is not evident in the policies of the rulers over six decades. It is neither seen in the conduct of State forces, which have an unprecedented record of brutish behaviour or in the right-wing extremists who enjoy corporate funding, government’s kid glove treatment and the media’s adulation despite the fact that they have an unbroken record of perpetrating the most heinous crimes imaginable on fellow Indians. Were Indians civilizationally against violence we would not have had the caste system or the sorry spectacle of India’s ‘good’ people remaining mute when brutal military suppression was being carried out in the north-east and J&K as well as the conspicuous absence of a demand for ‘no to war against our own people’. Non-violence is, therefore, an ideological construction to blunt opposition to a State which has been at war against its own people since 1947. It comes in handy to keep the oppressed subdued and compliant. All this makes it necessary to take the Maoists seriously because they defy imposed manufactured rule and question conventional wisdom.

Nevertheless, for Maoists to make their mark or expand politically they have to recognize that political plurality has become a hallmark of India just as much as its much-talked-of cultural diversity. While this political plurality does include them and their presence provides us a refreshing break from status-quoist and pro-Sate mumbo-jumbo, they will have to respect the fact that they may become a leading force but not the only force spearheading change.

I also doubt that the Indian people will settle for anything other than democracy, not what passes for democracy but a system far superior to the one we possess today. No matter what, they cannot afford reckless killings of the Jamui kind, followed by an apology which is unconvincing. An act like the beheading of the trade union

leader Thomas Munda of Kulta Iron Works in Sundergarh district, affiliated to CITU, for defying a bandh call by Maoists, can hardly endear them to those people who are not with them, yet need to be won over. I know in a mass movement mistakes will occur and crimes will get committed. However, the decisive fact for me is whether Maoists are willing to learn from their mistakes, and how fast they are at doing so. I agree that heinous crimes committed by squad members besmirch the entire resistance, belittle the selfless labour of thousands of ordinary Maoist cadres, and silence those who look to Maoists to set higher ethical standards because revolution is a struggle to create a people's democratic State and society. I also agree that a leader can cause strategic errors and tactical blunders, yet, theirs is a fight for a life of dignity for the mass of our people, as exemplified by the model they have set up in DK where in virtually every walk of life they have taken the people forward. Theirs is not a nihilistic project even when I concede that there are serious and inexcusable crimes they have committed. Also, in the overall scheme of things their crimes pose more of a threat to them because these are self-goals they score. Their achievements and commitment are something I respect and value.

Consequently, I believe that while revolution may not be 'an express train pulling into a station' sedately, as Lenin once wrote, nor can it mean descent into regression and acceptance of every act of crime in the name of the class struggle or because the reactionary classes practise barbarism. Revolutionary practices are not based on principles of reciprocity. Revolutionaries cannot mirror the practices of the State forces. How they wage their war of defence too exhibits their politics because war is the 'politics of bloodshed', politics by other means. The GS told Jan Myrdal and me in his interview that 'in general people and Maoist revolutionaries do not want violence or armed confrontation with anybody. In unavoidable conditions only do they take up arms and resist their enemies, and they are waging the liberation war by learning from history. So, we see this as a war of self-defence'. Yes, I concur with him. But these words must reveal themselves in actual conduct. If revolutionaries fight for life, they must fight honourably. Having taken root and

aroused hope they cannot afford to destroy it through indiscipline, intolerance and dishonourable conduct. Thus, unless the Maoists show respect for others, address uneven political development, bridge the difference between their practices and precepts as well as emulate the best practices followed, say in DK, the remarkable transformation they have brought about, the hope they have generated through their heroic labour in the lives of millions of our people, their brave fight for the ‘poorest of the poor’, all can get nullified and all the patriots who dream of the emancipation of our people from the scourge of exploitation and oppression would become so much the poorer.

MAP OF
CHHATTISGARH
(not to scale)
RAIPUR
Rajnandgaon
Durg
Mahasumand
MAHARASHTRA
Kanker
ODISHA
Narayanpur
Jagdalpur
Bijapur
Dantewada
ANDHRA PRADESH

Notes

PREFACE

1 www.indianarmy.nic.in/indar_doctrine.htm
2 Ibid., p. 10.
3 Ibid., p. 48.
4 Ibid., pp. 21–22 (emphasis mine).

INTRODUCTION

1 During the course of the Supreme Court hearing on Salwa Judum, it emerged that there were 70,046 SPOs in India. For these, the following break-up was provided: Chhattisgarh had 6500; Jharkhand 6400; Bihar 6353; Odisha 4480; Andhra Pradesh 2130; and Maharashtra 1500. 80 per cent of their honorarium is provided by the Union government. All that is required for a person to become an SPO is that they should be eighteen years of age, be educated up to the fifth class, and have two months' training in handling weapons (*The Times of India*, 26 April 2011).

Security force personnel possess light mortars, machine guns, rocket launchers, INSAS rifles, FN 35 and Glock pistols, Heckler and Koch MP5 machine guns and Carl Gustav Reconaissance recoilless rifles. Besides, they have air force support providing helicopters for ferrying troops in and out of the combat zone and aerial surveillance. Maoists claim they possess INSAS rifles, AK 47s, self-loading rifles and a cache of explosives (*Hindustan Times*, 10 October 2009).

2 *The Indian Express*, 17 July 2010.
3 *The Times of India*, 10 January 2011.
4 'The Narayanpur base,' said Brigadier B.K. Ponwar, head of Counter-terrorism and Jungle Warfare College, Kanker, 'shall be located right next to the den of the Naxalites. It shall have a good psychological impact on the Naxalites to know that the tiger is sitting just outside.' (*The Hindu*, 10 January 2011)

A senior army officer told *The Asian Age* on 2 June 2011 that 'there will not

be any permanent camp for training in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency for army personnel in Bastar. Jawans will [be] given training in temporary camps which will be shifted frequently to different locations in mountainous region of Bastar'. But a senior police officer explained that 'the training grounds chosen are mostly in Maoist strongholds. Frequent movements of army jawans in Bastar jungles, in course of their training, will put the Naxals under severe strain'.

In addition, since the army chief says that the army is there only to train and advise it is imperative that we familiarize ourselves with the army's 'Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations' which has been brought out by the integrated headquarters in the ministry of defence (Army). www.indianarmy.nic.in/indar_doctrine.htm. '[T]he military operations should aim firstly, at *neutralizing all hostile elements* in the conflict zone that oppose or retard the peace initiatives and secondly, at *transforming the will and attitudes of the people* . . . The endeavour should be *to bring about a realization* that fighting the government is a "no win" situation and that their antigovernment stance will only delay the return of peace and normalcy. Therefore, *distancing from the terrorists is in their own interest and the only plausible course of action*. However, the manifestation of *such a realization can take from a couple of years to decades as attitudes take time to form and to change*' (pp. 21–22, emphasis mine).

5 *The Times of India*, 13 March 2010.

6 *The Times of India*, 14 March 2012.

7 *The Asian Age*, 20 January 2011.

8 On 7 January 2011, the Supreme Court pulled up the Chhattisgarh government for not only providing misleading information on security forces vacating schools occupied by them in Bastar but also advancing an excuse for not being able to fulfil an apex court order by citing the area as being a 'conflict zone'. When the SC bench inquired from the Chhattisgarh state counsel if he realized the importance of a 'conflict zone' which had special meaning under international law and necessitates compliance with the Geneva Convention and Protocol, the State withdrew the remark. (*The Hindu*, 8 January 2011). In this instance 'conflict zone' was used as an excuse to wriggle out of complying with the Supreme Court order to vacate the school buildings. But treating Maoists became a 'heinous crime' for Indian security forces, whereas under the Geneva Convention and Protocol medical treatment is something none of the warring sides can obstruct. Maoists are not 'enemy' but our own people who, through the simple stratagem of proscription, get made into criminals, that is, into an illegal adversary devoid of any right or privilege which non-State actors are accorded under the Geneva Convention and Protocol.

FREE FALL

9 It is worth recalling that Hindutva terror groups also figure in having clandestine links with Israel. The charge sheet filed in the Malegaon bomb blast case uncovered support for terror groups' 'cause' in Israel and Nepal (from the royal family and the Nepal army). This lead was never pursued by the Indian government, just as they showed little inclination to probe how deep the involvement of army personnel with Abhinav Bharat was. See the study of the Malegaon bomb blast charge sheet prepared by Hemant Karkare as the head of the ATS (anti-terrorist squad) by Christopher Jafferlot in 'Abhinav Bharat, The Malegaon Blast and Hindu Nationalism: Resisting and Emulating Islamist Terrorism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xlv, 4 September 2010, no. 36.

WHY THE WAR?

10 *The Hindu*, 5 December 2010.
11 *Hindustan Times*, 10 October 2009.
12 www.stratfor.com
13 *The Asian Age*, 6 May 2011.
14 The PM said in his speech that 'there were only three staff in the Dantewada jail where the jailbreak took place' and spoke of 'large vacancies of police personnel across most States' but ignored other significant facts. A preliminary report of the International Association of People's Lawyers in October 2007 showed, through specific case studies, how poor adivasis comprised almost the entire prison population in the Dantewada district jail and how even those simply opposed to Salwa Judum were accused of being Maoist supporters and arrested ('Who are Dantewada Prisoners?', Nandini Sundar, Newind Press, 25 December 2007). Besides, like jails across India, Chhattisgarh jails too are overcrowded. The four central jails there with a capacity of 2949 have a prison population of 6502. Conditions in seven district- and sixteen sub-jails are even worse. Dantewada jail has a capacity of 100-odd prisoners but its prison population was thrice that at 375. The Jagdalpur district jail has 1700 adivasis detained for being Maoists or working for Maoists.
Most of these are poor adivasis. See also table below:

Name of Jail	**Capacity**	**No. of inmates**	**Naxalites/ Maoists**
Jagdalpur	648	1700	65

Dantewada	250	375	1 15 3
Kanker	65	231	79
Durg	396	1200	113
Ambikapur	593	1700	40

Source: *The Indian Express*, 26 April 2010.

Thus in five jails with a capacity of 1952 there were 5206 prisoners. It is worth recalling the evocative words of Verrier Elwin: 'The tribesmen suffer out of all proportion in jail. "If a Maria is sentenced to a long jail term of imprisonment," says Grigson, "he will beg to be hanged rather than be confined within walls: and few of the Bison horn Maria survive long imprisonment." The grim forbidding walls, the stone beds, the rule of silence, the unfamiliar food and language, the attitude of suppliant and obsequious deference before officials, the lack of religious comfort, the denial of human companionship, the appalling monotony oppress and crush them.' **(**Verrier Elwin, *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography*, OUP, 1964, p. 159.)

15 The war against Naxals and Maoists has a long history of bloodletting. For instance, police sources themselves admit that between March 1970 and August 1971 in Kolkata and its suburbs 1783 CPI (ML) supporters were killed. On a single day on 21 August 1971 in Baranagar, near Kolkata, 1000 young people may have been slaughtered in a single locality. Escape routes were blocked and police guarded every lane. By 1973, more than 32,000 CPI (ML) leaders, activists and supporters were jailed. In West Bengal alone there were 17,787 prisoners of which 12,016 were young and 1399 below eighteen years. Such was the phobia that twenty incidents of firing on unarmed Naxalites inside jails took place between 1970 and 1972. The killing of eight prisoners and injuries to sixty of them in Midnapore Central Jail on 17 December 1970 and the 21 February 1971 killing in Berhampore jail where ten inmates died and sixty-two were injured were some of the worst. [Taken from *Low Intensity Conflict*, CPI (Maoist) for internal circulation, year and place of publication not known.]

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

16 *EPW*, 31 October 2009.

17 Ibid., pp. 31–32.

18 Prabhat Patnaik, 'Predatory Growth', *EPW* 19, 2008.

19 *The Times of India*, 23 January 2012.

20 Salwa Judum was the local name for state-encouraged and promoted 'local resistance' against the Maoists. Reference to such stage-managed 'resistance' occurred for the first time in the annual report of the Union ministry of home affairs in 2003–-04. The report at one place links it to 'modernization and training of the state police forces and raising of Local Resistance Groups' (3.141, p. 46). It later goes on to mention (para 3.145) that 'recent developments in Jharkhand where CPML-PW encountered strong resistance from villagers in Lango village, P.S. Dumara, district East Singhbhum show a strong anti-Naxal feeling among sections of villagers. This feeling needs to be harnessed and channelized in making people's resistance groups to counter the atrocities committed by the Naxalite outfits. There is need to encourage and promote these local resistance groups . . .' (p. 47).

21 *The Times of India*, 7 June 2010.

22 *The Economic Times*, 20 August 2010.

23 Another issue is that of judicial intervention. In 2008, the Delhi High Court quashed the grant of a prospecting licence to Tata Steel to mine iron ore in an area spread over 2500 hectare of forests in Dantewada (Chhattisgarh). The High Court ruled that whenever the state is asked to divert any land for non-forest purposes prior approval under Forest Law and Rules are needed (*PTI*, New Delhi, 25 February 2008). Tribals were so resentful of the loss of their multi-crop fertile land that they were openly talking of armed resistance against the 5-mn-tonne Tata Steel Plant coming up in Dantewada for which these mines were sought. The inspector general of police (Bastar range), however, issued a warning that the 'strictest of action will be taken against anybody coming in the way of the *democratic process* involved in setting up this plant'. (*Hindustan Times*, 18 November 2007, empahsis mine) Thus not only does land grab become 'democratic', anyone challenging such a democratic process of land grab invites the wrath of the government forces.

However, the Delhi High Court order only quashed the mining right but not the setting up of the steel plant for which too land was acquired. (Note the similarity with Vedanta's Niyamgiri Hills bauxite mining which was suspended but the smelter was not asked to close down.) Therefore, it was a partial and temporary relief; the Supreme Court promptly stayed this order. But suppose they had not stayed this, what then? If everything else fails rulers have another bow in their armour. They can always propose changes to circumvent judicial ruling as was attempted in 2000 after the AP High Court judgment in the Samatha case. A letter from Secretary, ministry of mines, proposed, following the Samatha judgment, amendments to the Fifth Schedule and Article 244 under the plea that these Acts 'cannot purport to

take away the sovereign right of government to transfer its land in any manner'. (Letter from Ministry of Mines [#16/48/97-M.VI dated 10 July 2000]. Reference cited in *Abandoned: Development and Displacement*, Perspectives Team, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 15–17) Interestingly, in a February 2006 conference on forests called by the Confederation of Indian Industry, the organization advanced a claim that '[i]t is time to realize that the access, if any, enjoyed by these (forest dwelling) millions (of people) to forest products, is *simply by default*'. The implication was that industry cannot be barred from exploiting them and therefore advanced the claim for opening up the forest areas for mining or mineral-based industries. Ibid., p. 39.

24 *The Indian Express*, 20 August 2010 (emphasis mine).

25 *The Indian Express*, 14 March 2011.

26 'It is very clear that the anti-Naxal operations are being carried out in those districts (East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Khunti, Gumla, Bokaro, Giridih, Chatra, Latehar, Ramgarh and Hazaribagh) where the villagers are opposing the proposed projects for steel plants, mining industries, power projects, dams and sponge iron factories . . . Therefore, we have every reason to believe that the so-called operation green hunt or anti-Naxal operation is to get the adivasis' and other local settlers' land clear for the corporate houses rather than cleansing the Maoists from the areas. It seems that the state is essentially batting for the corporate houses in the name of the Maoists and instead of creating peace the government is creating insecurity in the state.' From the open letter sent by Jharkhand Indigenous People's Front, 19 March 2010 (Ref: gov/025/2010), to the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram.

27 'Bastar Privatisation Unlimited: Rivers for Sale in Chhattisgarh', Ashok Prakash Putul, http://www.bhumkal.blogspot.com.

28 According to the Centre for Child Rights in Jharkhand, water scarcity has resulted in non-serving of mid-day meals for school children and due to unchecked mining of coal, iron ore, bauxite, etc., groundwater has shrunk and 25,000 out of 40,000 ponds dried up (*The Asian Age*, 5 March 2011).

In the Vidharbha region of Maharashtra according to Vidharbha Bachao Samiti, a total of 2,201.23 cubic metres of water will be needed for eighty-five power plants. The state government has already changed the priority order for water allocation which was (i) drinking water; (ii) agriculture; and (iii) industrial purposes. An ordinance passed in 2010 downgraded agriculture, in an area which suffers from chronic shortage of water ('Plants vs plants', Sharmistha Chaudhury, *The Week*, 1 May 2011).

Consider also that in 2005 Jindal Power Ltd received three notices from wildlife warden cum district forest officer, Raigarh, for mining in 177 hectares of forest land within the Elephant Migration Corridor and for constructing a

dam over River Rebo. In 1996 the District Water Utilisation Council denied Jindal Power Ltd permission to draw water from River Kelu for industrial purposes. But the state PCC gave permission to build check dams across the river and sink wells to draw more than 35,000 cubic metres of water daily, reportedly, depriving thousands of farmers of water (*The Asian Age*, 19 July 2010).

29 *The Times of India*, 26 April 2011.

30 *Hindustan Times*, 8 February 2012.

31 *The Times of India*, 6 February 2012.

32 *The Times of India*, 'Mining in Orissa's Niyamgiri hills found to be flouting forest laws', 28 November 2009.

33 In Jharkhand 1.8 million adivasis have been displaced and 1.5 million acres of land taken away without their consent. In the name of promoting development the Bailadila mines were started four decades ago in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. A few hundred adivasis were provided employment as unskilled low-wage labour. In 1978, when people were demanding permanent employment in Bailadila, they were fired upon and tens of adivasis were killed, thousands of huts were burnt to ashes, rendering them homeless and left to fend for themselves. Women of Bailadila were sexually abused. More recently it was found that the POSCO project in Orissa will generate no more than 7000–17,000 jobs (including direct and indirect employment) in the next ten years, as against the projected claim of generating 8.7 lakh jobs. However, 22,000 families will be displaced and 20,000 families lose their livelihood. By gifting POSCO 600 million tonnes of high-grade iron ore from Khandadhar hills, of which 400 million tonnes can be exported for POSCO's plant in Korea, they stand to recover their $12 billion investment in less than eight years from iron ore mining alone.

The Tata Steel project in Bastar (Chhattisgarh) got peasants to part with their land under duress and then forged compensation paid to the peasants. Local activists in Lohandiguda possess evidence of 100 such cases of forged compensation. Bastar's regional peasantry also mention that Bodh Ghat Dam being constructed on Indrawati River not only poses an environmental threat but will also result in the submergence of thousands of acres of forest land, which in turn would mean loss of minor forest produce for the forest dwellers. Instead, people wonder why the government does not help promote agriculture, provide power, construct ponds, check dams and encourage small dams, lift irrigation, build anicuts, promote forest-based cottage industry and small industries as an alternate model of development? Why is this not considered a viable alternate path?

34 *EPW*, vol. xliv, 31 October 2009, no. 44.

35 *The Statesman*, 26 October 2010.

36 All India Fact Finding Report, *When the State Declares War Against Its People*, January 2006, www.pudr.org, p. 33.

37 *The Hindu*, 14 April 2010.

38 We are witness to systematic abuse by authorities in using arbitrary powers. Apart from arrests, torture, and fake encounters, the authorities have become brazen enough to suppress voices of dissent by accusing them of being 'Naxalite sympathizers', as though to be a Naxalite or a Maoist is in itself criminal. It took the Supreme Court judges to remind the Central and Chhattisgarh state government counsels that to hold sympathies is not a crime. We also saw how an attempt was made to mislead the Supreme Court by the officers of the court representing the Union and Chhattisgarh Government, about a purported ambush which took place in the early hours of 9 February 2010 near Ganchampalli in the Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. Moreover, proclaimed absconders sought by the first class magistrate in Konta (Chhattisgarh) for a crime of alleged gang rape, brazenly move around the Bastar region, and in full view of the police, threaten and lead mobs to attack social activists, but little of this news finds its way into the corporate newspapers. Independent social activists have been evicted from these areas (such as Himanshuji of the Vanvasi Chetna Ashram [VCA]) and a women's team which visited Narayanpatna (Orissa) or members of the National Alliance of People's Movement who went to Dantewada (Chhattisgarh) were prevented from visiting areas to ensure that truth about the dirty war does not find its way into the public domain. And even the Union minister of home affairs shied away from attending a public hearing in Dantewada, after promising to do so in a published interview.

Moreover, for me to be referred to in a charge sheet against Kobad Gandhy, filed by the Special Cell of Delhi Police in FIR No. 58/09 dated 20 September 2009, on 18 February 2010, in the court of Ms Kaveri Baweja, Tis Hazari, Delhi is neither unflattering nor inaccurate. It is the intent they attach to it or rather what the officials perceive to be wrong or unlawful; that's the issue. It is not my intention; it is the intention officials attribute to what they believe to be unlawful, which makes evident the obnoxious nature of the UAPA. The charge sheet says 'Mr Gautam Navlakha of PUDR is quite supportive to their outfit CPI (Maoist) and he (Kobad Gandhy) met him many times in Delhi and Mumbai prior to his arrest in the present case. He also met him in Tihar Jail, Delhi.' (p. 15) The exact implication of 'quite supportive' and 'met him many times' arises only because the UAPA criminalizes every contact and every relationship. In other words once you

proscribe a political party and prevent its ideology from being propagated or promoted, as well as declare as unlawful and terrorist the organization and its members, then you criminalize what is otherwise normal and legitimate. If the law says that holding a meeting even of three persons belonging to a proscribed organization is 'unlawful', then the authorities are justified in taking away a person's freedom. Membership of a proscribed organization is a crime (U/S 10 and 20 of UAPA). These provisions are accompanied by procedures and rules which enhance the power of the police and prosecutor at the expense of the accused—and simultaneously relax the exacting standards for collecting, collating and use of evidence. For instance, in trials under such Acts judicial officers tend to attach a premium to testimonies of police personnel; even when the evidence raises doubts about the authenticity of police claims, judicial officers tend to accept such versions as authentic. There is no better example than the judgment in the Binayak Sen case. Although in the first ever conviction under the revised UAPA, a sessions court in Ranchi advanced the same argument while convicting Amitabh Bagchi, a politburo member of the CPI(Maoists) and another senior leader, to life imprisonment. Everything else being equal the weight attached to police testimony is given more credence.

39 Let me cite two instances: On 8 February the Supreme Court ordered that in Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 103 of 2009, twelve 'disappeared' adivasis including Shambho Sodi be produced before it on 15 February 2010. The case related to victims and witnesses to a massacre at Gompad village on 1 October 2009. Since 2 January 2010, Shambho Sodi had gone missing. When on order of the apex court she was brought to Delhi by the Chhattisgarh police for treatment, no one was allowed to meet her, not even her lawyer. By the time the court ordered that her lawyer be allowed to meet her without the police being present she had once again gone missing. In response to this on 29 January 2010 the court ordered that she, along with eleven other adivasis, be brought back to Delhi by 15 February 2010. However, on 9 February the apex court was informed that in pursuance of its order on the evening of 8 February a team of 300 police guided by Hari Ram, an SPO, left on foot for Ganchampalli to fetch seven of the twelve adivasis. The police team reached—at 5 a.m. on 9 February—the village of Gurkha, on the way to Ganchampalli, where they first met with a landmine explosion in which SPO Hari Ram lost both his legs and another policeman got injured. Thereupon the police team came under Maoist firing. The fax produced before the apex court also said that Ganchampalli was a Naxal hotbed. Since neither media nor social activists are being permitted to enter the 'war zone' there was no independent confirmation of the story. However, a fact-finding team by the Coordination of Democratic Rights Organisation

(which among others comprised APCLC, HRF, PDF, PUDR, CPCL, NPMHR, etc.) found that the DGP of Chhattisgarh who claimed that two SPOs were killed on 9 February was being less than truthful. The team visited Gompad village on 13 February 2010 and villagers stated that no such incident had taken place. Instead, on 10 February SPOs and a police party attacked the village of Ganchampalli, near Gompad, picked up ten of the villagers and took them to the Dornapal base camp. Village head Pudiam Lakshmaiah told the team that Kadithi Muthaiah (thirty-five), Kadithi Venkaiah (twenty-five), Kunjam Veeraiah (thirty-five), Kunjam Chilakaiah (thirty-two), Parisi Venkaiah (twenty-five), Parisi Veeraiah (twenty), Vanjam Dharma (thirty-four), Madivi Edima (thirty-two), Povasi Edima (thirty) and Sodi Podiya (forty-five) were forcibly taken by the SPOs and police and that they had not heard anything since then. Thus it is evident that Chhattisgarh authorities in connivance with the Union home ministry and its various agencies will go to any length to thwart efforts to bring out the truth.

This is not all. On 6 January 2010 a team of social activists were accosted by members of Maa Danteshwari Swabhiman Manch and prevented from participating in a padyatra called by Himanshuji of Vanvasi Chetna Ashram in Dantewada. The same members of this organization had attacked VCA and also abused and hurled eggs and stones at social activists. All of this was dutifully broadcast by a malleable media as a manifestation of adivasi anger against the supposed pro-Maoist proclivity of the social activists. The fact that the 6 January attack on social activists was led by Soyam Mukka, an absconder in a case of gang rape of an adivasi girl in March 2008 (case no. 84/09 of 2009) by the judicial magistrate, first class, in Konta and that all this took place in full view of Chhattisgarh police, which claimed that they were unable to trace any of the eight alleged rapists, makes the role of the state government, the police administration and the Union home ministry suspect. What is also obvious is that the institutions of the State and its agencies and the corporate media would much rather patronize alleged rapists, killers and looters than allow the truth to become public. It is this deliberate attempt to silence all voices and not allow any independent views to filter out of the war zone and, on the other hand, the patronage given to alleged rapists, killers and looters that makes this dirty war, nay police action, so life-threatening as far as constitutional democracy is concerned.

A BRIEF COMMENT ON THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

40 One of the winners of National Teachers Awards, principal of KVSS High School, Champaran (Bihar), told the media on 4 September 2010 that ‘Operation Greenhunt will not succeed in India. The fact is Naxals have won

the hearts of people by helping them reclaim their land which traders had grabbed. People trust them'. Another teacher, principal of government high school in Bastar district, said that 'people have come to believe in Naxal justice . . .' (*The Tribune*, 5 September 2010).

THE JOURNEY

41 Verrier Elwin, *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography*, OUP, 1964, p. 153.

WHAT ABOUT KILLINGS?

42 21 January 2010?

43 The Jamui massacre involved the killing of twelve tribals, including women and children, and the wounding of fifty others on 17 February 2010 in Phulwaria-Korasi village of Jamui district of Bihar allegedly by the CPI (Maoist). The massacre is reported to be in retaliation for the killing of eight Maoist cadres on 1 February, who were allegedly taken into custody and then killed by the police.

44 On 20 November 2009 eight bogies of the Tata–Bilaspur passenger train were derailed near Manoharpur railway station in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand by the armed cadres of CPI (Maoist), in which two persons, including a two-year-old, died and fifty-one were injured. The derailment, allegedly using detonators, was caused in the course of a two-day bandh on 19–20 November when, according to local Maoist leaders, they were demanding that one of their arrested leaders be produced in the court. According to Samarji, Secretary, Bihar–Jharkhand–Orissa regional committee of the CPI (Maoist), the 'mistake' occurred because of 'overzealous new recruits'.

WHY THEY ARE NOT SCARED

45 Gautam Navlakha and Asish Gupta, 'The Real Divide in Bastar', *EPW*, vol. XLIV, 15 August 2009, no. 30.

46 *The Times of India*, 7 October 2010.

47 *Hindustan Times*, 7 December 2010.

48 The Planning Commission protested to the prime minister about the Union Cabinet's decision that the Integrated Action Plan should follow the centralized structure for funding and assessment whereby the district collector, the superintendent of police and the district forest officer will

comprise the committee which will oversee IAP programmes. It also protested the dropping of conditionalities such as ban on liquor contractors from tribal areas, implementation of the Forest Rights Act, and using panchayati raj institutions for IAP. The Union Cabinet said in most districts PRI is defunct and that it is impractical to try and build these up. Also it was said one could not mistrust civil services (*The Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*, 12 January 2011).

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

49 Dandakarnya Writers, *The Dandakaranya Literary Movement: A Study*, 1992?, pp. 2–8.

THE ISSUE OF LAND

50 APDR, IAPL, PUCL and PUDR, 'Background', *When the State Makes War On Its Own People: Violation of People's Rights During the Salwa Judum*, January 2006, http://www.pudr.org.

WHITE TERROR

51 Ibid.

ABUJMAAD

52 *The Asian Age*, 10 May 2010.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

53 *The Indian Express*, 5 December 2009, New Delhi.

54 There are several funded NGOs which have been blaming the Maoists for destroying schools in conflict zones. The sad part of such reports is their downplaying of the condition of schools. As though once a building gets designated as a school it does not matter whether it is actually fit for children —whether it has basic facilities including drinking water available for children and whether there are windows, doors, blackboards . . . Civil liberties groups and social activists have moved the courts in West Bengal and Jharkhand as well as the apex court to get the security forces to vacate schools occupied by them, which is what turns the building into a military target. There are clear directives in the Geneva Convention to the military forces not to occupy

schools, hospitals/clinics or use the Red Cross insignia on vehicles being used by the military.

The CPI (Maoist) party pamphlet titled ‘Security Forces, Vacate Schools and Ashram School Halls Immediately! Strengthen the movement for the implementation of the Supreme Court Orders! Do not convert schools into police stations and police camps but appoint school teachers in these schools’ was issued on 5 February by the east Bastar division committee.

The pamphlet gave the statistics that more than 156 schools in Dantewada and Bijapur districts were presently occupied by security forces. Another pamphlet distributed by the east Bastar division committee on 8 February 2011 claims that in five blocks of Bijapur and Dantewada, school and ashram buildings in Cherapal, Pamalvai, Cheramangi, Murkinar, Naimarh, Matwara, Jaiwara, Pinkonda, Nelnar, Ranibodli, Toynar, Gudma, Bodli, Polampalli, Injaram, Maraiguda, Aranpur and Palna villages, schools now function as police camps. Besides, ashrams located in Padera, Pidia, Tamneri, Kadenar, Vechhapal Munder, Tudem, Dharmapuram, Regadgatta, Todka, Torram, Ilingair, Dadli and Dabbakunta have been moved next to police or relief camps, rendering the schools redundant for the villagers who fear venturing close to the police station. According to them, in the interior villages of Basaguda, Usur, Gangalur, Mirtul, Kuttru, Bhopalpatnam, Konta and Kistaram, schools have stopped functioning and teachers are reluctant to attend these schools because they are suspected to be Naxalite sympathizers.

The pamphlet highlighted the pathetic situation of how teachers could not stay in the villages as the police had even occupied the staff quarters in the schools.

The pamphlet endorses the SC orders asking the forces to vacate the schools when it goes on to say ‘the highest court of our country in a PIL filed among others by Nandani Sundar, Ramchandra Guha, Manish Kunjam, has ordered the Chhattisgarh government on 18 January 2011 to vacate, in four months, the schools and ashrams which have been turned into camps of police and paramilitary forces in Bastar region. In the circumstance that the orders are not implemented it gives a very interesting call to ‘all the ordinary people, teachers, intellectuals and all those who have stood by people, to come forward to implement the decisions of the Supreme Court.’

The pamphlet also makes an appeal to all those absentee teachers, who are not carrying out their duty as teachers, to come forward and teach students in the new session. The pamphlet appeals that people fully cooperate with the teachers when they come to the school. It ends by saying that ‘[i]n the situation where teachers do not come, we appeal to the people to protest in front of the higher officials demanding the presence of teachers’.

Joint report by Sarva Dharma Sansad, People's Union for Civil Liberties and Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, *Of Human Bondage: An Account of Hostage Taking in Bastar*, March 2011, www.pudr.org.

A HURRIED AND MUCH TOO SHORT A MEETING

55 *People's March*, August–September 2006.

END OF OUR JOURNEY

56 See 54.

WHAT I BELIEVE

57 Sumanta Bannerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, p. 363.
58 *The Times of India*, 17 December 2010.
59 *The Times of India*, 28 September 2010.

MORALITY RISES ON A FULL STOMACH

60 Randhir Singh, *Marxism, Socialism, Indian Politics: A View from the Left*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 326.
61 Ibid., p. 327.
62 Ibid., p. 328.
63 *The Times of India*, 7 March 2011.
64 *The Week*, 6 March 2011
65 *The Times of India*, 23 February 2011.
66 There are now an estimated seventy-five million firearms in South Asia, sixty-three million of which are in civilian hands. India and Pakistan overwhelmingly account for most of the weapons (40 million and 20 million respectively) where there is local production as well, while civilians in Nepal and Sri Lanka own an additional three million weapons (?). Civilians are the largest category of gun owners in the region, accounting for far more weapons than the military, police and insurgents. See the IANSA site: www.iansa.org/ regions/scasia/scasia.htm.
67 *The Economic Times*, 1 June 2010.
68 *The Tribune*, 15 February 2011.

MAOISTS PLAY A CATALYST'S ROLE

69 *Hindustan Times*, 25 October 2009.
70 *The Indian Express*, 12 January 2011.
71 *The Asian Age*, 4 January 2011.
72 *The Indian Express*, 17 May 2011.
73 *The Economic Times*, 16 May 2012.
74 Amartya Sen as reported by *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India*, 9 January 2011.

TO FIGHT HONOURABLY IF FIGHT THEY MUST

75 Out of 626 districts in India, no less than 136 districts are subject to a policy of military suppression. Of these 136 districts, 101 have been notified as 'disturbed areas' where AFSPA and state-level Disturbed Areas Act, either separately or concurrently, operate. In thirty-five of the so-called joint forces operations against 'Left- Wing Extremists' neither of these Acts are invoked and yet the war continues. (Of course there could be in Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal . . . some other Act in operation indemnifying forces.) However, for all practical purposes the ground reality is no different in these thirty-five districts spread over nine states and the 101 districts where AFSPA is notified.

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Needless to add I alone am responsible for the facts, views and opinions expressed in the book.

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